A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY: UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF COLLEAGUES IN TEACHERS’ ENGAGEMENT IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

by

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Abstract

Professional development includes the planned and unplanned activities that teachers engage in throughout their career to enhance the quality of instruction in their classrooms (Day, 1997). The attentive processes of engagement are described as being physically, emotionally, and cognitively present (Kahn, 1992). Engagement in professional development is strongly related to the level of commitment teachers have to their teaching profession (Rothwell & Herbert, 2007). Being engaged in professional development is necessary because it requires that teachers take responsibility for their learning, and believe that professional development practices will positively contribute to their career (McDonald, 2009).

The purpose of this research was to understand the role of colleagues in teachers’ engagement in professional development. This study is situated within the conceptual framework of school culture. School cultures are sustaining patterns built over time through rituals, traditions, and accomplishments that enforce actions, feelings, and thought patterns of members (Deal & Peterson, 2009). One cannot have strong and effective professional development without a thick culture (Hopkins, 1994; Little, 1982). Thickness in culture is often forgotten but foundational for engagement in professional development activities (Glover & Coleman, 2005).

This study is an examination of teachers’ perceptions in two schools: one school that showed exemplary collaboration among its staff and one school that was becoming a more collaborative school. Collaboration is understood as working in cohesion to achieve a common goal (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Little, 1982; Schlechty, 2009). One focus group with teachers at each school, with follow-up
individual interviews, provided the data explaining colleagues’ influences on engagement in professional development.

The findings of this study suggest that colleagues have an important effect on teachers’ engagement in professional development. Participants indicated that colleagues were a factor of engagement because they increased engagement through fulfilling their desire for face-to-face instruction, through their appreciation of being worked with, rather than worked on (Morewood & Bean, 2009), and through networking. As teacher participants worked together in professional development, they increased their school’s organizational capacity (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001).
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Chapter 1

Introduction

While teaching in Saskatchewan, I had a strong desire for professional development. I considered myself to be a lifelong learner and believed that this was an important factor in being and remaining a competent teacher. I welcomed change and innovation into my classroom. I readily accepted new curricula and aims from the school division’s board. However, I was on a staff that had maintained and used the same curriculum for 25 years with little to no change; when the changes in curriculum did come, they were slow and incremental, but they were positive and occurred through the continued efforts of professional development. Yet one reluctant teacher did not share the collective enthusiasm in the changes that were being implemented. This teacher made attempts to convince the staff to maintain the status quo, believing that consistency in practice and materials meant less work for the staff. The teaching staff did our best to persuade this teacher about the benefits of innovation and change, but was met with opposition. After I left the school and began my academic journey, the behaviour of this teacher led me to inquire into the role that colleagues have in teachers’ engagement in professional development. This thesis is a result of my inquiry—a collective case study on understanding the role of colleagues in teachers’ engagement in professional development.

In this introductory chapter, I present the purpose and research design of this study. Next, I outline the context of the study and introduce the two schools in which I
conducted my research, and then define the key terms. Finally, I review the structure of the thesis, providing a brief description of the subsequent chapters.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this research was to understand the role that colleagues play in teachers’ engagement in professional development. The guiding question for this research was: *How do colleagues play a role in teachers’ engagement in professional development?* The following questions were instrumental for the facilitation of this study, providing clarity and focus:

1. What is the nature of professional development in selected school sites in Saskatchewan?
2. How and for what purposes do teachers engage in professional development?
3. What role does collaboration play in teachers’ engagement in professional development?
4. What are the enablers of teachers’ engagement in professional development?

In order to answer these four questions, I chose two schools in a large, urban school board in Saskatchewan to conduct my research. I used document analysis, direct observation of the school sites, focus groups, and follow-up individual interviews to gain potential inferences from the data collected in order to understand my research questions.
Context of the Study

In order to examine the role of colleagues in teachers’ engagement in professional development, I chose to return to the school division at which I taught prior to beginning my research journey. I chose this research site because of a prior knowledge of the school board, and the connections that I created there eased the access of gaining participants in the study.

My teaching career was in an affluent semi-private school where uniforms were worn and parents picked up and delivered their children daily. The schools in which I conducted my research were vastly different from my experience. The first school was nearing the need for a lunch program since their children were beginning to come to school hungry, and the second school had to cut a teacher from their roster in order to fund a universal morning snack and a selected lunch program. Both schools were in lower socio-economic areas of the city but had a wide variety of students in attendance. Both schools cater to large populations of *English as an Additional Language* (EAL) students, with refugee and immigrant students that make up the EAL population. Both schools are full to capacity, but that is the sum total of their similarities. The first school is full but still functional and suitable for the students’ and teachers’ needs. The second school is dilapidated; the foundation is pulling away from the walls, the stairs are crooked at an angle, and the classrooms are small and barely sufficient to accommodate the three grades held within each classroom. Another difference exists: the second school will be torn down and replaced with a new school next year.
I started with a concept map of questions that shaped my inquiry. I considered questions such as: what is professional development, how is it being used, and is it useful? From there more questions developed: what fosters a professional development rich environment, what makes professional development good, and does the teacher in the next classroom impact one’s professional learning? I began to question the effectiveness of professional development in changing student outcomes, and whether it affected the school culture. It was from there that I questioned whether the school culture was affecting professional development. I began to read that organizational culture is the platform on which an organization builds its foundation. An organization, and in this case, the school, is best understood through its levels of culture and how day to day practices are carried out (Hargreaves, 1994; Schein, 2004). Therefore my purpose of understanding the role of colleagues in teachers’ engagement in professional development necessitated an understanding of organizational culture within two schools that were functioning at varying degrees of perceived collaboration. Each school has a unique school culture; therefore focusing on the culture afforded me the opportunity to understand the role of the colleague in professional development in differing situations.

Rationale

According to McDonald (2009), little research has been carried out to understand what factors influence teachers’ engagement in professional development. Teachers participate in professional development for a variety of reasons. Attendance may come because of interest, role modeling by principals and lead teachers, or because of union or
administrative mandates (Sparks, 2004). Mandates have become a large part of teacher workload in Saskatchewan (Curriculum & E-Learning, 2007).

Learning more about professional development within schools will aid in understanding “the human dynamics that nurture and sustain meaningful changes in learning and teaching” (Strahan, 2003, p. 129). A physical and social environment that promotes interaction and collaboration is more likely to engage teachers in professional development practices (Jurasaita-Harbison & Lex, 2010). Engagement in professional development is strongly related to the level of commitment teachers have to their teaching profession (Rothwell & Herbert, 2007). Being engaged in professional development is necessary because it requires that teachers take responsibility for learning; moreover, teachers must first believe that the professional development practice will positively contribute to their career (McDonald, 2009). Changes in teaching behaviour require that teachers understand the process, the goals of the school board, the environment, and the motivations that are present in the professional development experiences. As well, professional development is important to study since it is a catalyst in school reform and improvement plans (Guskey, 2000).

**Significance of Research**

Much of the research on school culture and professional development surrounds the role of the principal (Colbert, Brown, Choi, & Thomas, 2008; Engles, Hotton, Devos, Bouckenooghe, & Aelterman, 2008; Lieberman, & Grolnick, 1996; Nelson, 1998; Shachar, Gavin, & Shlomo, 2010). Principals are an important part of a program’s
success (Lieberman & Grolnick, 1996) but they are not the only component. Teacher collegiality is often overlooked due to the predominant hierarchical structure of schools (Glover & Coleman, 2005). Research shows that teachers impact their own learning environment through collaboration, cooperation, and reflection (Jurasaitė-Harbison & Lex, 2010; Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation (STF), 2006). Moreover, individuals shape their contexts for learning within the larger context of school culture (Perscarmona, 2010). Simply providing new information about learning is insufficient for professional development to take place; the culture and practices should support the professional development efforts made by teachers (Nelson, 1998) in order to enact change. My research sought to enhance the understanding of the culture and practices that enable those development efforts.

**Definition of Terms**

The key terms that are associated with my study are organizational culture, school culture, cultures of teaching, engagement, professional development, professional learning, colleagues, and collaboration. Each term is defined below.

**Organizational Culture**

The working definition that I used for this research is attributed to Schein (2004) who defined culture as:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well
enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 17)

The vehicles that teach new members the correct way to perceive, think, and feel are the artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and underlying assumptions which are the three levels of organizational culture (Schein, 2004). These levels dictate behaviours, norms, accepted practices and the general ‘feel’ of an organization.

**School Cultures**

The definition I chose to work with describes school cultures as sustaining patterns built over time through rituals, traditions, and accomplishments that enforce actions, feelings and thought patterns of members (Deal & Peterson, 2009).

**Cultures of Teaching**

Cultures of teaching “comprise beliefs, values, habits, and assumed ways of doing things among communities of teachers who have had to deal with similar demands and constraints over many years” (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 165). Like organizational and school cultures, cultures of teaching have sustained patterns of “who we are and how we do things around here” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 145).

**Engagement**

Often suggested as the new ‘buzzword’ in management (Saks, 2006), engagement has a variety of definitions and connotations. Mowday, Porter, and Steers (1982) first described engagement as organizational commitment. Saks (2006) described engagement as being more complex than simply organizational commitment since there are many
variables that encourage or discourage work engagement. Saks also stated that there are varying degrees of engagement. He suggested that engagement is not an attitude; rather it is the attentiveness and absorption of an individual into a role. It is the use of emotions, cognitions, and one’s physical presence that determines the degree of engagement.

Christian, Garza, and Slaughter (2011) agreed; they defined “work engagement as a relatively enduring state of mind referring to the simultaneous investment of personal energies in the experience or performance of work” (p. 95).

An engaged individual exhibits four attributes: attentiveness, connectedness, integration, and a diligent focus on tasks (Kahn, 1992). These four attributes are what Kahn referred to as psychological presence. Kahn’s in depth research shows the complexity of engagement, therefore for the purpose of this research, engagement is defined as psychological presence.

**Professional Development**

There are numerous purposes and functions of professional development (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 1998; Geringer, 2003; Gordon, 2004; Kwakman, 1998; Morewood & Bean, 2009). Professional development are activities through direct means of conferences, courses, or workshops; learning in school through mentoring, critical friends, collaboration, and action research; and learning outside of school through partnerships with universities, and professional development centres (Day, 1997). I define professional development similar to that of Day as the planned and unplanned activities, both formal and informal, which benefit the individual, group, or school by
contributing to the capacity of students, colleagues, and the school throughout a teaching career.

**Professional Learning**

Learning is the goal of professional development (McDonald, 2009). The aim of development is for improvement, and in order for improvement to take place, change, or learning must occur. Professional learning is described as ‘on the job’ learning (Kwakman, 1998) that is specifically directed toward the issues of greatest importance within a school, for example teaching in a school with at-risk youth requires specific training for teachers to meet the diverse needs of those students.

**Colleagues**

I refer to colleagues as persons who are working within the same school together. According to the policy document, *Guide to Effective Teaching Practice* (n.d.), collegiality means contributions to the ‘team’ mentality of a school.

**Collaboration**

Steiner (2000) viewed collaboration as a natural process because we cooperatively construct our identity in relation to others. The nature of a collaborative relationship is considered as caring and respectful, it is complex, it is regulated by vision, it is cognitively and emotionally charged, and it relies on a belief in collegial capabilities (Fullan, 1999; Steiner, 2000; Strahan, 2003). Members in collaborative roles continue to learn from the consequences of those engaged in the collaborative process with them; it is a concentrated learning mechanism. Also, support, care, trust, and respect foster the
passion of the vision of the work in collaborative schools (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001).
Collaborative cultures best serve both veterans and novices alike (Kardos, Johnson, Peske, Kauffman, & Liu, 2001). My working definition for collaboration is a cohesive group working toward a specified goal (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Little, 1982; Steiner, 2000).

**Overview of the Thesis**

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduced my research interest, the purpose of this research, and the definitions of key terms. Chapter 2 lays the foundation of prior research and pertinent literature for the context of this study. Chapter 3 details the research design and methodology. My rationale for a collective case study is argued therein. I also discuss issues of trustworthiness in this chapter. Chapter 4 presents the findings from the focus group and individual interviews. In Chapter 5 I first present a thematic and theoretical analysis that connects the findings of the study to the relevant literature that framed the study; it includes a discussion of the role of the schools’ cultures. This chapter ends with implications, further research suggestions, and conclusions.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

The following chapter reviews the literature pertaining to culture, engagement, and professional development. I first discuss organizational culture, then I expound on the notion of school culture since it is perceived to be a significant factor in professional learning (Jurasaite-Harbison & Lex, 2010; Little, 1982). School culture provides the lens through which I understand the context of professional development. The notions of thick and thin cultures are highlighted in this section because thick cultures provide the foundation to quality professional learning (Little, 1982). The notion of cultures of teaching is discussed since the form and content of these cultures pertain to this research. Collaborative cultures and collaboration are discussed since they contribute to effective professional development. Next I discuss the role of engagement in collaboration. Following that, professional development is more clearly defined and I delineate its many purposes. I also provide the context of professional development at the research site. Then, professional learning is discussed as the primary purpose of professional development (McDonald, 2009). Capacity is discussed to provide an understanding of the levels of professional learning. Finally, the notion of parallel leadership is positioned as a factor of increasing capacity and collaboration in schools (Crowther, Ferguson, & Hann, 2009). I conclude this chapter with an overview of my conceptual framework for this study.
Organizational Culture

Although some view culture as simply “who we are and how we do things around here” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 145), it is much more: culture is the seen and unseen of the organization (Hodge, Anthony, & Gales, 2003). It is the artifacts, the structures, the thoughts, the conversations, the people, the policies, and the beliefs and assumptions within an organization (Schein, 2004). Culture is created and it actively creates (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

Culture is observable and described as the general feel that a place generates amongst its group or organization. This ‘see’ and ‘feel’ idea is a two-level construct described by Hodge et al. (2003). They contend that culture is first, the observable: the level of dress, the architecture, the policies, those things visible to the observer; and second, the unobservable: the shared values, the practices and norms, the beliefs and assumptions of the individuals within an organization. Schein (2004) identified three levels of culture: artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and underlying assumptions. Artifacts are described as those things in the organization that are explicit. Although they are easy to observe their meanings are difficult to decipher since one has to be immersed in the culture in order to become aware of their meaning. To gain a clear understanding of the artifacts, an observer can take notice of the implicit levels: espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions. Espoused beliefs and values are the guiding principles of right and wrong. Underlying assumptions tell organization members how to see and think about things. Artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and underlying
assumptions guide and enhance one another to make the culture of an organization distinct.

**Culture and Role Definition**

According to Schein (2004), culture directs members’ behaviours and is defined as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 17)

These patterns reinforce the notion that culture is both a product and a process (Bolman & Deal, 2003). As a product, it includes the wisdom of those who created the central ideas in the first place; as a process, it is embodied in newcomers as it is renewed and re-created. The renewal cycle continues as the newcomers eventually become knowledgeable about the culture and pass on that knowledge.

Cultural roles exist for people within an organization to know their boundaries. What is permissible for a person in a certain position may not be permissible for another in a slightly different role. Goffman’s (1959) Role Theory is helpful in understanding how culture differentiates within organizations. One’s role can only be played if there is another human with whom to interact. Within any given role, descriptions, prescriptions, expectations, and perceptions exist. A description is what one is perceived to be doing; a prescription is what one ought to be doing; an expectation is what is believed about one’s position; and perception is how one is viewed within an organization. Schein (2004)
asserted that, “at the core of every culture are assumptions about the proper way for individuals to relate to each other in order to make the group safe, comfortable and productive” (p.178).

Culture continues to act as a differentiation for individuals and groups, putting the notion of ‘us’ in perspective. Culture is a way that determines who is ‘them’ and who is ‘us’ in society (Hofstede, 1984). Not only does culture orient ‘our group’ in relation to other groups, it also dictates where ‘we’ fit within an organization and a community.

Van Oord (2008) described this fitting as personal and social identity. Personal identity is what makes a person unique. Social identity is one’s role, which could be akin to a hat; people can take off one role identity and place on a new/different one, as they switch groups or change roles.

**Thick and Thin Cultures**

The thinness or thickness of a culture determines the widespread acceptance of a culture (Hodge et al., 2003). A thin culture is one where ideas are not widely spread throughout an organization and therefore culture does not play a key role in the centrality of the organization. Conversely, a thick culture is one that is widely accepted and fully distributed throughout an organization.

Culture is a determining factor for the strength of an organization in five key areas: direction, pervasiveness, strength, flexibility, and commitment (Lorsch, 1986). A culture can steer an organization toward or away from its goals; its direction can be consistent or counter to an organization’s goals. Pervasiveness is a reference to the thickness of a
culture; if a culture is thick, or pervasive, its members readily adopt the culture. Strength of a culture is parallel to the strength of an organization. If members share the same core values, the thickness is enhanced and the organization is strengthened. Flexibility is the ability to change and adapt within an organization’s culture, and it is the ability of the individual to adapt also. Finally commitment is the amount invested in the organization, either monetarily or emotionally. These five factors contribute to the strength of an organization’s culture.

Van Oord (2008) posited that individuals want to belong to a thick culture. Belonging contributes to a positive self-image, and these images are increased through having a positive group image. It is the group dynamic that impacts individuals’ senses of belonging.

**School Culture**

School cultures are sustaining patterns built over time through rituals, traditions, and accomplishments that enforce actions, feelings, and thought patterns of members (Deal & Peterson, 2009). School culture, like any organizational culture, is created and maintains stability for its participants. It dictates how people interpret interpersonal transactions. This suggests culture’s profound force in driving change in education. School culture is the inclusion of the environment, the administrative organization and the experiences of those within the schools (Glover & Coleman, 2005). School culture is a “neglected dimension of the improvement process” (Hopkins, 1994, p. 81) because it is the foundation of the organization it has the potential to create sustaining improvements.
School Culture Thickness and Professional Development

School culture acts upon its participants. Since schools are organizations, their cultures can be thick or thin (Hodge et al., 2003). Engels et al. (2008) confirmed the thickness of school culture through five interrelated areas: goal orientedness, participative decision-making, innovativeness, leadership, and cooperation between teachers.

A pervasive or thick school culture permeates all aspects of professional activities. One cannot have strong and effective professional development without a thick culture (Hopkins, 1994; Little, 1982). Likewise, a thick or pervasive culture is created and reinforced through professional development aims. Pervasiveness in culture is often forgotten but foundational for engagement in professional development activities (Glover & Coleman, 2005).

The notion of thickness or thinness of a culture is an important factor in creating a climate for professional development. Thinness of a school culture can be related to Turbill’s (2002) concept of inhibitors or enablers on professional learning:

Structures, conditions, language-in-use, and personal relationships are all central to support the dynamic interaction between the knowledge domains in a professional learning system. All have the potential to become enablers, and thus facilitate learning, or inhibitors, and thus act as barriers to learning. At various points in time, one or all of the above could have the potential to inhibit learning. The key to success is having sufficient enablers
in place so that something can then be done about them. (p. 114, italics in original)

These inhibitors and enablers are concepts of levels of culture: artifacts and norms. When artifacts and norms act as enablers, they increase the potential for learning. Thus a thick culture is a necessary aspect of professional development.

A thick school culture may be an inhibitor because, as Schein (2004) postulated, thick cultures are sometimes too stable and could be unwilling to accept change. Thus, within a thick culture, a learning gene must be well established. This learning gene concept needs to be ingrained in the organization’s beliefs and involves learning as a large aspect of their foundational values in order to maintain a thick culture. Shachar et al. (2010) agreed. Since schools tend to have cultures rooted in routine, a learning gene is essential to foster professional development. The stability and routine may have to be confronted in order for the culture to experience a shift. A change agent may be a new member or an expert brought in to educate teachers, and reinforce new norms.

To further establish the connection of a thick school culture and professional development, Jurasaite-Harbison and Lex (2010) iterated Schein’s (2004) levels of culture through their six points of engagement. As a reminder, Schein’s levels of culture are: artifacts and norms, espoused beliefs and values, and underlying assumptions. The two artifacts and norms identified by Jurasaite-Harbison and Lex (2010) are (1) the schools’ physical and social environment promotes professional interaction, and (2) institutional history and policies create a stable and positive environment. The espoused
beliefs and values evident are: (3) collaboration is an explicit purpose and process for teachers and administrators; (4) opportunities for outside collaboration are available and supported; and that (5) teachers regard informal learning as an important part of their professional work. Finally, an underlying assumption that Jurasaite-Harbison and Lex (2010) identified is that (6) teachers and administrators hold a common interpretation of education policies. All of these cultural structures, according to the authors, are required in order for engagement in professional development activities to be effective and worthwhile for the teachers that engage in the practices.

In schools where the culture is thick, critical practices are evident throughout the school (Little, 1982). In both location and frequency, consistent experimentation abounds in a thick school culture. Thick culture acts as a speedy transmitter of knowledge, which is central to the theme of culture and professional development (Nelson, 1998). How knowledge is transmitted around a school tells a great deal of perceptions of school culture and ideologies surrounding professional development because teachers shape their context for learning within a greater context of the school’s culture (Pescarmona, 2010). Culture and professional development are integral to each other. Simply providing new information for learning is insufficient to support and encourage new behaviour (Nelson, 1998). Rather, a thick culture must be in place to allow for positive change within schools.
Cultures of Teaching

Cultures of teaching “comprise beliefs, values, habits, and assumed ways of doing things among communities of teachers who have had to deal with similar demands and constraints over many years” (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 165). The unique demands of teaching create cultures of teaching through providing “meaning, support, and identity to teachers, their work, and the relationships between them and their colleagues” (Kutsyuruba, 2008, p. 18). Like school culture, cultures of teaching are patterns of rituals that guide beliefs, values, and forms of practice (Hargreaves, 1994). Content and form are the two dimensions of cultures of teaching. The first dimension, form, is the attitudes and rituals that are shared within a specific teaching group. The second dimension, content, is the relationships and associations among teachers. The conjoint understanding of the form and content helps outsiders to understand cultures of teaching.

Engagement

Engagement is an enduring state described as being psychologically present within one’s role performance (Kahn, 1992). Psychological presence has four dimensions: individuals “feel and are attentive, connected, integrated, and focused on their role performances” (Kahn, 1992, p. 322). Attentiveness denotes that one is not disabled by anxiety in their role. Connections come through identification with others within their roles through collaboration. Connectivity in engagement manifests as people ‘losing themselves’ in their work. Integration is playing a variety of roles while experiencing
wholeness within those roles. Finally, focus, suggests that engaged individuals will channel their energies into physical, cognitive, and emotional capacities.

Through trust and safety, engagement can flourish (Kahn, 1992). Once engagement is achieved, growth, learning, change, and productivity can occur. Moreover, an engaged individual leads to an engaged organization. As Kahn (1992) argued,

The long-term implication of such presence is that people who are present and authentic in their roles help to create shared understandings of their systems that are equally authentic and responsive to change and growth … When individuals are open to change and connecting to work and others, are focused and attentive, and complete rather than fragmented, their systems adopt the same characteristics, collectively. (p. 324)

Engagement is a partnership between an organization and an individual (Wolf, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009). When an organization is collaborative, inclusive, and affirming, levels of engagement are high and success is probable. Often when engagement is researched, it is the organization that is the unit of analysis, but Wolf et al. (2009) argued that both the organization and the individuals should be studied. Organizations are studied because, according to Saks (2006), when an organization fails to provide an atmosphere conducive for engagement, individuals withdraw and become disengaged. Role performance is therefore contingent upon the socio-emotional resources of the organization. Saks (2006) also discovered that “employees who perceive higher organizational support are more
likely to reciprocate with greater level of engagement in their job and in the organization” (p. 613).

Christian, Garza, and Slaughter (2011) suggested three consequential theories of engagement: the first, engaged employees are highly connected to their tasks; the second, engaged employees are more efficient and therefore more likely to take on extra responsibilities; and third, all aspects of the organization are part of the teachers’ domain and an engaged individual will go beyond an assigned role to achieve the goals of the organization and their coworkers. When individuals participate in challenging, clearly assigned, varied, and creative experiences, while they are somewhat autonomous they are engaged (Kahn, 1990). Engagement also comes through “rewarding interpersonal interactions with co-workers” (Kahn, 1990, p. 707); however, these interactions must involve individuals viewing collaboration as a necessary part of teacher practice. Heightened interaction increases perceptions of value and mutualism (Crowther et al., 2009). “Engaged employees are also more likely to have high-quality relationship with their employers leading them to also have more positive attitudes, intentions, and behaviours” (Saks, 2006, p. 613).

**Collaboration**

School cultures tend toward thin cultures because of the isolation of teachers within the teaching profession (Lortie, 1975). Brief interpersonal transactions are often the only orientation to a new site that teachers are given, which heightens the mentality of a ‘sink or swim’ culture within a school (Kardos et al., 2001) increasing teacher isolation.
Orientation programs to schools are often seen as ‘a joke’ (Kardos et al., 2001). Teachers often feel they learn accepted practices as information trickles down in schools rather than being explicitly taught about norms and practices.

Lortie (1975) suggested that those attracted to the teaching profession tend also to be attracted to the status quo. Because of this status quo mentality, individualism is often the resistor to collaboration in schools. Since change cannot be brought on through teacher isolation, collaboration is a necessary goal for school cultures. As teachers build trust and compassion, which is the foundation of collaboration, success is within reach (Fullan, 1999).

**Levels of Collaboration**

The notion of a thick culture can be equated to a school’s ability to collaborate. Collaboration is working in cohesion to achieve a common goal (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Little, 1982; Schlechty, 2009). Collaboration promotes stability and flexibility within an organization, learning from one another, extension of personal limits since it builds on the work of others, a lasting impact, a consistent and purposeful dialogue, a commitment to the future, a revival of purpose, and possible changes to be readily instituted (Steiner, 2000). Kutsyuruba (2008) postulated that school cultures can be depicted on a continuum, based on the degree of collaboration. This continuum includes non-collaborative, pseudo-collaborative, and collaborative cultures.
Non-collaborative cultures are found in Lortie’s (1975) discussion on teacher isolation. Teachers in a non-collaborative culture learn quickly that they are to work alone, focus on maintaining the status quo, and therefore lack vision for the future of the school. Kardos et al. (2001) revealed these non-collaborative cultures to be veteran-oriented. In these schools, the majority of staff members are experienced educators with well-established patterns of practice. Interaction within this group is minimal and not work related.

Pseudo-collaborative cultures possess features of both collaborative and non-collaborative cultures (Kutsyuruba, 2008). Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) identified three such cultures: balkanized, comfortable, and contrived collaborations. I expand on each below.

In balkanized cultures, groups compete against one another for position and status. Kardos et al. (2001) equated balkanization to novice-oriented cultures. In a novice-oriented situation, new teachers are the majority of the professional population and there are no veterans to be mentored by, so little guidance is provided. These schools are typified by competition, zealous practices, innovations, and high rates of burnout.

The second form of pseudo-collaboration is comfortable collaboration (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). This type of collaboration does not push the limits of the individual; rather the status quo remains and focus is only on the technical side of teaching and not the ideologies behind the instruction.
Finally, the third pseudo-collaborative culture Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) identified is contrived collaboration. Contrived collaboration has the intention to bring teachers together to achieve new goals and attempt new technical skills, but this type of collaboration is often is forced, reducing the potential for true collaboration.

Kutsyuruba’s (2008) third level on the continuum, collaborative culture, is best explained by Steiner’s (2000) three types of collegial collaboration. The first, distributed collaboration is specific to partnerships. These partnerships are highly casual but occur in organized contexts. Mentoring is an example of distributed collaboration where both members are working toward improving teaching practice. The second, complementary collaboration is a widely practiced form of collaboration; it is characteristically a division of labour. Partners in complementary collaboration are striving to reach a common goal through complementary capabilities, for example, when teachers work together on a thematic teaching unit for their classrooms. Each teacher will use his or her own area of expertise to contribute to the collective thematic unit to benefit the whole group. The third type, integrative collaboration, is indicative of prolonged commitment, shared vision and ideologies. The core of integrative collaboration is the desire to transform existing structures of knowledge, thought styles, approaches or visions. This type of collaboration is akin to the notion of professional learning communities that is discussed further in the section pertaining to professional learning.

Collaboration can be highly beneficial (Little, 1982). Teachers increase in confidence because of collaboration, which allows them to support colleagues. Since the
nature of collaboration increases teamwork and effectiveness, it gives teachers a shared purpose. Because of shared purpose, collaborative schools can implement innovative practices. Fullan (1999) stated that collaborative schools are selectively innovative identifying necessary areas for focused improvement through practice and action research. In these collaborative cultures, mistakes are learned from and honed for continuous improvement (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). True collaboration is found when individuals experiment and take risks in their learning (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001). Collaboration does not hide the individual, but works on personal improvement and group improvement simultaneously (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996).

Participation in collaboration itself is professional development (Varga-Atkins, O’Brien, Burton, Campbell, & Qualter, 2009). The more time that is allotted to collaboration, the more teachers can engage in informal discussion surrounding theories, practice, and process as they relate to instruction (Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007). It may be wise to pay more attention to this form of informal learning since it has been shown to be an important factor in student learning (Parise & Spillane, 2010). Little (1982) supports the notion that teachers build a shared language through informal talk about formal practices. When teachers’ practices are observed and given feedback, the observations enhance the shared language and increase the effectiveness of teacher talk. When teachers plan and prepare together this shared language allows the collaborative experience to be truly common among the staff.
Professional Development

Professional development is designed to enhance teacher work (Day & Sachs, 2004). Whether the process of professional development is for community learning or mandated upon teachers (Sparks, 2004), it is best promoted by coherence with teachers’ goals, district standards, and student assessments (Colbert et al., 2008).

Guskey (2000) described the many kinds of professional development activities: training, observation, direct involvement in a process, study groups, action research, individual activities, or mentoring. These professional development practices each have advantages and disadvantages. Training is the most common activity since it is cost effective and can quickly disperse knowledge throughout a school board; however it is also least likely to enact real change in teaching practice. Observation is a lengthy and costly process that readily institutes change because it involves peer feedback and accountability in teacher practice. Involvement in a process occurs if a teacher were to become part of a curriculum review; however, since these groups tend to be small, change is on an individual or small-group level. Study groups are usually situated within a school and are to be directed toward the internal school issues, this notion is similar to a professional learning community, which is discussed in greater detail further on. Action research is also a lengthy process that benefits a small number of practitioners. Teachers involved in action research become reflective and when change is instituted it occurs over long time period. Individual activities, such as obtaining one’s master’s degree, are highly personal and are likely to facilitate change within the practitioner but are not as
likely to lead to systemic school-wide change. Finally, mentors enact change through their competency and support. Mentoring is described as “pairing an experienced and highly successful educator with a less experienced colleague” (Guskey, 2000, p. 28). This practice is also individualized but is beneficial to both the mentor and the mentee. The mentor benefits through the fostering of professional relationships, and the mentee benefits from the knowledge, skills, and observational feedback of the mentor.

**Professional Development for Student Growth**

The ultimate purpose of professional development is to enhance students’ learning and school experiences (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Learning through professional development impacts student learning because teacher quality is the largest factor in student learning (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Geringer, 2003; Mitchell & Sackney, 2001). Effective development provides teachers with sufficient time for engaging with the material. Sufficient time allows them to be more actively engaged in their learning thus positively affecting student learning (Morewood & Bean, 2009).

Professional development that is effective for student gains focuses on content knowledge, active learning, and empowerment (Garet, Birman, Porter, Yoon, & Desimone, 2001; Gordon, 2004). Empowerment through successful professional development activities can have influence on the individual teacher, educational teams, the school organization, curriculum, instruction, assessment practices, and on student growth and development. Students benefit from professional development “through five key organizational structures: supportive, shared leadership; collective creativity; shared
values and vision; supportive conditions; and shared personal practice’’ (Hord, 1997, as cited in Doolittle, Soodeck, & Rattigan, 2008, p. 305).

**Professional Development in Saskatchewan**

Professional development, as outlined by the Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan, is promoted through a variety of methods and technologies in order to support teaching and achieve learning outcomes of the curriculum (Curriculum & E-Learning, 2007). The Ministry of Education and the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation expect teachers to be actively engaged in professional development in order to maintain a high-quality education program.

Another aspect influencing professional development in Saskatchewan is the Continuous Improvement Framework (CIF). The CIF document states that educators in Saskatchewan believe in a shared responsibility of improvement. The CIF is focused on the areas of increasing literacy, equitable opportunities for all students, smooth transitions between levels of education, and transparency in school governance. As part of the provincial CIF, each school division has its own set of goals. Within those divisions, each school is to individually create a Learning Improvement Plan (LIP) that aligns with the goals of the division and the CIF. The LIP is to be collaboratively determined by the principal, staff, and the school community.

The statement of purpose and beliefs published by the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation (2006) outlines the policy and supports required for a successful teaching practice. The Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation does not explicitly state professional
development as a belief; however, reflection on, and adaptations to practice are stated as 
beliefs of teacher success (STF, 2006). Reflections and adaptations, according to the 
Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation are to be supported through colleagues, designated 
time and resources, and are not be part of formal evaluations of teachers.

A teacher must reflect personally and collectively to enhance teaching practices 
(STF, 2006). The Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation also stated that it is the 
responsibility of the school’s internal community to support teacher success through time, 
resources, and collaboration. It remains the individual’s responsibility to set and attain 
goals for professional growth; however, to achieve these goals, the administrative staff in 
schools and school boards must ensure that proper training occurs. In order for this 
training to occur, “goals, objectives and content of these programs should be developed 
collaboratively” (STF, 2002, p. 20) among teachers and administration.

The research site policy document, Guide to Effective Teaching Practice (n.d.) 
aligns with the STF (2006) policy document. The guide states that professional 
development is a planned and ongoing activity that is separate from evaluation. 
Professional development is an individual’s prerogative, yet it is to be supported within 
the school’s site and align with the school’s focus of improvement. Professional 
development is best enhanced through self-reflection, collaboration, and collegial 
interaction. This school board aims to promote involvement of other members within a 
school, the school board, and the broader school community through professional 
development experiences.
**Professional Learning**

Professional learning is the underlying goal of professional development (McDonald, 2009). The shift in professional development is from teaching as a set of skills to teacher learning (Collinson, Kozina, Yu-Hao, Ling, Matheson, Newcombe, & Zolga, 2009). Learning for teachers is explained through Knowles’ (1980) Adult Learning Theory. This theory describes seven factors that are ideal for learning to take place: (1) a need to learn; (2) a conducive environment that includes trust, respect, helpfulness, freedom of expression and acceptance; (3) the goals of the learning experience align with personal goals; (4) learners take ownership of planning and implementing; (5) participation; (6) it is related to and engages prior learning; and (7) progress is felt. When these issues or factors of learning needs are addressed, isolation decreases and collaboration among teachers increases (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009). This is the foundation of a learning community: “those who take an active, reflective, collaborative, learning-oriented, and growth promoting approach toward the mysteries, problems and perplexities of teaching and learning” (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009, p. 5). These concepts of collaboration, teacher learning, and problem-solving are terms also found in organizational learning literature.

**Organizational learning.** Organizational learning is a structure in the culture that shapes the activities and the identity of the organization (Nicolini & Meznar, 1995). There is no prescribed way to set up the process of organizational learning; it is an organic process that takes time and investment in practice and individuals (Collinson,
Cook, & Conley, 2006). Organizational learning exploits what members have already learned as they work together to innovate and it allows members to become proactively engaged problem solvers invested in long-term solutions.

Organizational learning involves three levels of learners, the personal, the group, and the organization (Collinson et al., 2006; Mitchell & Sackney, 2001). It is inquiry-based learning that is shared among members, in order to strive for innovation and change. Organizational learning is a long-term investment; it is not a curriculum, but a way of thinking and doing (Collinson et al., 2006).

The conditions that foster organizational learning resemble the notions of a thick culture: (1) learning as the top priority; (2) learning is spread throughout the organization; (3) the focus is on collegial relationships; (4) inquiry is encouraged; (5) power is distributed to all staff; and (6) personal goal achievement as well as group achievement is the aim (Collinson et al., 2006). The beneficial outcomes of organizational learning are overall improvement, and shared professional knowledge.

**Learning communities.** Schlechty (2009) defined a learning community as a group of people who meet together with a common goal, or issue. A learning community is typified by a well-established culture of procedures, respect, trust, and mutualism that is results-oriented. A learning community seeks to find answers to questions and solutions to issues that are action-oriented. Nelson (1998) stated that knowledge is built, not transmitted in chunks, therefore teachers need to be able to discuss learning practices and pedagogy to create an intellectual culture. Nelson further proclaimed that in order for
professional learning to be effective, “the entire culture of the school need[s] to be characterized by an orientation toward inquiry” (1998, p. 209).

Putnam and Burke (2006) contended that a sincere member of a learning community shares a common purpose with the group. Sincere members will express collegiality as they allow outsiders to become part of the group; they are not balkanized community members. Being open to change, members of a learning community view the learning community as an opportunity for self and group actualization.

Another form of an organizational learning is a community of learners (Schlechty, 2009). A community of learners is when members come together to discuss their learning opportunities or to learn a new skill or process. It is a venue for discussion but does not have a long-term focus like a learning community.

**Professional learning communities (PLC).** Engaging professional learning and development can be traced back to the days of one-room schools where teachers met at the end of the day on the back porch (Yendol-Hoppey & Dana, 2010). The notion of the back porch was common to traditional schools. Here was a safe location where the teacher could discuss the day, their interactions with the students, and ask for advice about the day’s frustrations. Back porches of today require time, facilitation, transparency, questions, support, wisdom, variety, and contributions. The requirements of a back porch are similar to the current literature surrounding PLCs. The PLC has the potential to foster school improvement (Mullen & Schunk, 2010) since it is a school-centred form of professional development (DuFour, 2004; Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990).
PLCs allow teachers to come together to form common goals, and build upon their own skills. The PLC justifies the “shift from working on teachers to working with them” (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990, p. 229, italics in original). Working with teachers, rather than working on teachers, encourages engagement in their learning (Morewood & Bean, 2009), which creates opportunities for teachers and principals to learn together and improve teaching (Collinson et al., 2009; DuFour, 2004).

PLCs foster an environment for effective professional development through structural or core frameworks (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002). Structural aspects of professional development include nontraditional formats, lengthy time spans, dependence on the learning required, and collaboration among peers. Core learning is active as it provides opportunities for feedback on practice. Its purpose is to reinforce content knowledge in subject specific areas. Core learning is coherent because it aligns with opportunities to learn with personal goals. PLCs should include structural and core values and beliefs in order to be effective.

Mullen and Schunk (2010) stated that PLCs must be “supported through a shared vision, a purposeful agenda, and a commitment to the change process” (p. 193). Youngs (2001) affirmed that effective PLCs have shared goals, which use in-depth inquiry, engage in problem-solving, are focused on teacher empowerment, and most importantly have collaboration engrained into their structure. An important factor of PLCs is the transference of skills and ideas from both the novice and the veteran teachers (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990). These collegial relationships are the foundation of effective PLCs.
PLCs increase a school’s ability to transition through and implement change (Mullen & Schunk, 2010). Since PLCs are site and problem specific, they are an effective structure for reinforcing new practices surrounding school-specific challenges. Furthermore, teachers’ perceptions and actions showed significant changes when their on-the-job learning was tied closely to practice (Parise & Spillane, 2010).

**Capacity**

Capacity is the potential or limitations within organizations (Schlechty, 2009). The potential or limitation can be found in individuals, groups and organizations. Each individual, group, or organization exercises its capacity when it is called upon for action. Mitchell and Sackney (2001) explained capacity through three levels: personal, interpersonal, and organizational; these capacities are interrelated and intertwined, dependent on the capacity of the other levels. All three levels must function at their potential otherwise capacity suffers at all levels.

Personal capacity is outlined as individual development of one’s leadership skills. In order to begin building personal capacity the first step is reflection (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001). It is in reflection that one can begin to address misconceptions or erroneous thinking. Reflection also shows the power structure that individuals are engaged in. Acknowledgement of power differentials allows for equal distribution of power, which allows for collaboration to become common practice. Personal capacity provides direction and purpose toward goals, suggesting that a thick culture is necessary to nurture capacity. Once personal capacity is built and enhanced, a person can then
facilitate the learning of others into their own leadership capacity through mentoring relationships and collaboration. Individual learning is also enhanced through creating interpersonal capacity (Smylie, 1995).

Interpersonal capacity is emergent and not forced (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001). This capacity alludes to the sharing of power among teachers and principals. A thick culture needs to be in place to support and maintain interpersonal capacity. A leadership rich culture is the first step toward capacity; the second step is time for collaboration. Through collaboration a shared vision and purpose can direct the interpersonal capacity toward success. This shared vision needs to permeate through all members of the school. Interpersonal capacity is the social structure that facilitates and supports the sharing of vision and power.

Organizational capacity is the structure that supports personal and interpersonal capacity (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001). The primary focus of organizational capacity is communication. Effective communication in an organization allows collegial discourse and problem-solving to be a central focus for the community of leaders.

Schlechty (2009) argued that transformation in schools comes as a result of capacity building. Transformation, according to Schlechty, is shifting schools from top-down styles of learning in to learning communities for both teachers and students. A school’s capacity can be strengthened through professional development practices (Youngs, 2001). As capacity increases, growth is shown at all levels of an organization: the organization itself, the group within the organization, and the individual within the
group (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001). Authentic capacity building requires time to build and to troubleshoot concerns (Doolittle et al., 2008). A school’s capacity is transmitted through the conduciveness of climate and community (Youngs, 2001). The shared vision for school programs and the leadership style have a profound effect on a school’s potential. In schools that were deemed high-capacity learning communities, Mitchell and Sackney (2009) realized the organizational, group, and individual efforts were increased and sustained. They noticed that the deep connections among people, structures, and outcomes were enhancing improvement efforts and creating results. The personal, interpersonal, and organizational capacities must all work together to increase the capacity of a school.

**Parallel Leadership**

It is deep connections, not necessarily solely the principal that creates a culture for collaboration within schools (Crowther et al., 2009). Parallel leadership envisions that all teachers can be leaders and have an impact on the decision-making processes of the school; thus school direction is not left solely to the principal. Parallel leadership focuses goals and strategies on areas of weakness to build capacity. Capacity is built through mutualism, shared purpose, and an allowance of individual expression. Mutualism is described as trust and respect between teacher leaders and teacher leaders and their principal. Shared purpose encompasses a shared commitment and shared values, teachers must believe in and perpetrate a transparent decision-making process within the school. Parallel leaders must also collaborate in problem-solving through positive and consistent
communication. Though it may seem counterintuitive, individual expression is important in parallel leadership. Individual expression allows strong leaders to have strong personal convictions, and enforces the need for those leaders to understand and accept others’ strong convictions in the shared practices.

Parallel leadership allows for a framework for understanding and enhancing the capacity of others (Lewis & Andrews, 2009). Trust is at the centre of functioning parallelism. Professional conversations increase and nurture the capacity of the school. Collaboration becomes a norm that is enhanced in atmospheres of trust and parallel leadership (Sentocnik & Rupar, 2009). As McGuinness (2009) showed through a snapshot of one school in a disadvantaged neighbourhood, a high achieving school could be the norm through the use of shared vision, organizational learning, and determination. The school showcased that collaboration and a system focus that empowered others created a sense of ownership and awareness of continuous improvement.

Holonomy. Parallel leadership builds upon the notion of holonomy (Costa & Garmston, 1993). Holonomy is a coined term that combines autonomy and interdependence. It encompasses the understanding that individuals are autonomous units that have to act as a member of a whole. Holonomy in schools begins with increasing personal capacity through supporting individuals into self-actualization. Holonomy strengthens the whole through individuals naturally learning from and acting according to the culture that surrounds them. Finally, holonomy is achieved through creating consciousness and development of one another. This is accomplished through valuing
and utilizing the strengths that are in individuals within the group. Holonomy is about interaction, not fixing the current situation. Its purpose is to create a foundation of trust. Like parallel leadership, holonomy has a focus of developing the individual as well as the group. Holonomy is naturally fostered since it builds on the intrinsic motivations of people, as each person strives for efficacy, learns to be flexible, develops his/her own craftsmanship, increases their consciousness, and yearns for reciprocity and interdependence holonomy increases. Holonomy enhances trust in self, relationships, mentoring processes, and the environment. Holonomous people align behaviours with values; they act intentionally, contribute to the group goals, seek out alternative avenues to achieve goals, strive for improvement, generate and encourage reciprocity, and reflect on and learn from experiences.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework (see Figure 1) shows school culture as the foundation that directs members’ behaviours (Schein, 2004). Underpinning the conceptual framework is a thick school culture that supports the notions of engagement (Kahn, 1992), professional development (Day, 1997), and collaboration (Steiner, 2000). In a thick school culture these areas are interconnected in a cyclical process: engagement enhances professional development, professional development enhances collaboration, and collaboration enhances engagement. For example, as teachers become engaged, their uptake of professional development increases (Sentocnik & Rupar, 2009), whereas the increased engagement leads to more effective professional development (Wolf et al.,
2009). As a result of teachers’ developing their personal capacity, the interpersonal capacity of the school is ultimately enhanced as well (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001). Once interpersonal capacity is built, greater collaboration occurs with the increased support from the organization (Saks, 2006), which in turn increases engagement. Similarly, when teachers choose to uptake professional development, they naturally interact with other teachers, while the increased level of collaboration in turn leads to a heightened sense of engagement. Likewise, in the process of collaboration teachers develop a sense of engagement, which potentially leads to discussions about the needs of their school and a subsequent need for increased professional development.

The rationale of the conceptual framework is that teachers may enter this cycle at any area to see the other areas increase. For the cycle to function, it is important that the school culture is thick, providing the foundation for quality professional learning (Little, 1982). Furthermore, a thick culture creates in members a positive self and group image through a sense of belonging (Van Oord, 2008). In agreement with the aforementioned argument, teachers could also see the opposite happen within the cycle: as engagement decreases, the extent of professional development also decreases, leading then to a decrease in collaboration, and even isolation. Isolation is equated with disengagement (Shernoff, Marfíñez-Lora, Frazier, Jakobsons, & Atkins, 2011) and would therefore cause teachers to uptake less professional development.

Embedded within the framework are the research questions that guided this study. The research question regarding the nature of professional development is aimed at
understanding the nature of professional development in selected schools in Saskatchewan; hence its sole connection is to professional development. The second research question about the purposes of teachers’ engagement in professional development is aimed at understanding the rationale for teachers’ engagement in professional development; therefore, it investigates the connection between engagement and professional development. The third research question about the role of collaboration in teachers’ engagement in professional development is connected to the three components of the framework: thick culture, collaboration, and the link between collaboration and engagement. Finally, in the fourth research question, the enablers of teachers’ engagement in professional development are positioned as features of a thick culture; therefore, this question links engagement, professional development, and the notion of a thick culture.

Much of the literature regarding engagement in professional development involves understanding the effects of leadership, however, this research embarked on a lesser studied role of colleagues in teachers’ engagement, therefore theoretical perspectives were not apparent and it was necessary to create a conceptual framework. This conceptual framework shows the boundaries of this study as derived from the understanding of the literature, and provided me with clear direction for understanding the many factors involved in this study.
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework
Summary

This review has provided a comprehensive overview of the terms: culture, engagement, collaboration, and professional development. The discussion on culture provided the lens to understand collegial influence in engagement in professional development. Within the literature is a clear connection between effective professional development and the thickness of a culture. A thick culture is enhanced through collaboration. As well, building capacity within the individual, group, and organization contributes to the effectiveness of professional learning, which is the overall goal of professional development experiences. Furthermore, studies examined within the literature review have had similar methodologies to collect data utilizing focus group interviews, individual interviews, (Colbert et al., 2008; Jurasaitė-Harbison & Lex, 2010; Kardos et al., 2001) and a case study approach (Morewood & Bean, 2009). However, these studies did not address a gap in the literature: how colleagues influence engagement in professional development. This study aimed to develop a deeper comprehension of colleagues’ influences on teachers’ engagement in professional development.
Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the details of the research methodology and method. A qualitative research design was utilized for this study. In this chapter, I outline the process of data collection, the sampling process, the stages of data analysis, and finally the establishment of trustworthiness.

Case Study and the Qualitative Approach

Stake (2010) clearly outlined the purpose of the qualitative approach: it is interpretive, experiential, situational, and personalistic. The qualitative approach is first interpretive because it allows the viewpoints of multiple perspectives to be understood and sought after. The foundation of the qualitative approach is to understand those involved in the context. A qualitative approach is experiential and situational because it is based in situ, striving to be natural and not manipulate data but allow the data to expose itself in an organic way. It is also experiential, in this case, because it uses the researcher’s personal judgment as the filter for understanding the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ of activities. Thus, data in a case study are enriched by the multiple experiences and perceptions of participants. Finally, it is personalistic because it intends to understand perceptions of participants’ lived realities.

A case study approach is necessary when the research questions are phrased as how and why questions (Yin, 2009). The purpose of a case study is to illuminate the complexity of an issue (Creswell, 2007). Stake (2005) argued that a case study is not a
methodology, rather it is the unit of study to be analyzed; Creswell disagreed, stating that it is the methodology, the research design, and the final product. Creswell’s view is holistic, encompassing all parts of the case study. It was through this holistic view that I approached my study. The focus of a case study is to describe and analyze the case. Case study research involves creating and investigating a bounded system, or one case, through multiple sources of information; the case may be an event, phenomenon, program, or individual. A case study can be qualitative, quantitative, or consist of both. In this instance, it is qualitative since it is exploratory in nature (Yin, 2003) and experiential (Stake, 2010).

The methodological perspective of Yin (2003, 2009) gave an outline of what needed to be investigated. Yin (2003) presented five components of a case study: the research questions, the argument that a researcher may have of a theoretical issue, the chain of logic that links data to that argument, and the criteria for interpretation. It was from Yin that I understood that I would be building a case using multiple sources of evidence. I chose to use a collective case study approach because “the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). I preferred Yin’s terminology of a ‘collective’ rather than ‘multiple’ for my case study because it framed the image of one final argument rather than having multiple arguments upon completion.

My choice to use a collective case study approach allowed me to strengthen inferences through an understanding of commonalities and differences in participants’
experiences (Stake, 2005). Stake’s approach to case studies can be viewed as poetic, and more interpretive than Yin’s methodological perspective (Brown, 2008). Stake (2010) asserts that a researcher understands the naturalistic world through personal experiences, and the aim of the researcher is to understand. Stake views the researcher as an interpreter who builds a clear view of the phenomenon that is studied. Stake (2005) also argues that the boundaries of a case surround issues and it is the researcher’s duty to understand the relationships within the phenomenon.

This research is guided by the “rigour of Yin and enriched by the creative interpretation described by Stake” (Brown, 2008, p. 9). The marriage of the ‘what’ of a case study as explained by Yin, and the ‘how’ as explained by Stake supplied my foundation of the case study perspective. Choosing to conceptualize this holistic view allowed Creswell’s (2007) union of Stake and Yin to guide the methodology of the case study. The challenge presented within a case study is to determine the case and often selection can become difficult in collective case studies (Creswell, 2007). As Yin (2009) and Creswell (2007) maintained, a strong rationale is required for cases to be deemed credible, as well as establishing strong links between the data. Strict decisions must be made to maintain the rigor of case study research since too many cases or points of data often make analysis diluted. Researchers must also take clear steps to bind the case in both information and time in order to clearly establish boundaries of the case study. Furthermore, as Stake (2005) and Creswell (2007) affirmed, the case study should
illuminate a phenomenon through exploration and description of the lessons learned by the researcher.

**Collective case study boundaries.** In order to understand how colleagues affect teachers’ engagement in professional development I chose to investigate teacher interactions. The boundaries of the case included the collaborative culture at the school sites. In order to investigate the culture of collaboration I chose one school that was perceived to be highly collaborative and one school that was working toward becoming more collaborative. I chose to omit the principal from the boundaries of the case study in order to closely focus on collegial impacts on engagement. I also did not want to understand how engagement increased student learning which is why I chose to exclude student progress from this study. I did this to understand how engagement in professional development varies within different school cultures.

**Data Collection**

This study involved document analysis, observation of two schools within the same school board, and focus group and individual interviews of teachers within each of these two schools. This section outlines the process data collection, my sampling strategy, and observation protocols.

**Site and Participants**

My research took place in a large, urban school board in Saskatchewan. I chose this site because I had familiarity with the superintendent that initially allowed my access to the research sites. Being a former employee of this school division, I had participated in
professional development, which gave me a strong familiarity of the vernacular and a personal, first-hand understanding of the divisional policies and practices.

**Document Selection**

Data collection began in June of 2011. I began with selecting the document published by this school division, *Guide to Effective Teaching Practice* (n.d.). This document was coded and analyzed in June and July of 2011. Following my coding of the focus group and individual interview data I determined that it was necessary to revisit this document to gain a better understanding of the framework in which these schools function. Hence, document analysis was used to gain an understanding of the nature of professional development as outlined by the school board.

**Research Sample**

In December of 2010, a superintendent had granted me potential access to the school sites once my proposal was approved; however, I came on site near the end of June 2011 to discover that he had resigned. Thankfully he left me another contact and I was able to meet with another superintendent of the school board to discuss the parameters of my research. After our meeting, she took the information to the Director and Deputy Director for their approval and subsequent suggestions for school sites based on the criteria for the study. The directors gave me a list of schools that were similar in demographic and on varying levels of collaboration. The criteria for school selection were only that one school was perceived as having a highly collaborative culture (purpose driven and have a strong belief in the collective staff) and the second school was
to be working its way toward a collaborative culture. Use of the two schools with varying levels of collaboration was an example of purposeful maximal sampling as outlined by Creswell (2007).

Based on the Director and Deputy Director’s nomination of seven schools, which met the criteria (they were paired, one school perceived to be collaborative and one school working toward becoming more collaborative), I contacted the principals of each of the schools to determine their staff members’ willingness to participate in the research. It was a slow process, as my original intention was to have more decision-making power in the sampling process. Due to the small scope of the study and the time frame of a Master’s study, I had to rely on convenience sampling (Patton, 2002). The schools of two principals who agreed to participate both met the criteria of the study and became the schools that I investigated. These schools were at varying levels of collaboration and highlighted different perspectives on the role of the colleague in professional development engagement. The two schools were in lower socio-economic areas of the city and had high English as an Additional Language (EAL) populations.

Recruitment within each site was a different task. In the first school, the principal was uninvolved in the process of recruitment. She allowed me to come to the school and sit in the staffroom and recruit participants as needed. I met each of the teachers who were involved in the focus group prior to the focus group session and had one-on-one contact with them by e-mail. I was able to obtain eight participants as per my original research design. The second school’s principal had a very different leadership style; all
information flowed through him and I was required to meet with him prior to the focus group interview. In this school, I met the nine teacher-participants for the first time on the day of the focus group.

My original intent was to interview teachers who had more than one year of experience at their school so that they could have long-term experience within the culture of the school. This long-term experience was to enhance the likelihood of information rich participants (Patton, 2002). It was not until after the focus group had started in the second school when I discovered that one participant was new to the school that year. Rather than excluding her I permitted her to stay to see if there was variance in her responses with those who had been acculturated into the staff. She had just as much insight into the culture of the school; her status of being an ‘insider’ that was still on the ‘outside’ of the culture intrigued me and I decided that I would include her in the follow-up interview if she were to volunteer.

**Focus Group and Individual Interviews**

The focus group and follow-up individual interviews were conducted in October and November 2011 in the first school, and in November to December 2011 at the second school. I facilitated both focus groups, each lasting for about 75 minutes. I also took notes throughout the focus group discussions. The first school included eight participants; in the second school, there were to be eight as well, but a ninth showed up late. I audio-recorded the focus group discussions (with permission) and transcribed the data verbatim.
The purpose of the focus group was to gain insight into collegial relations as related to professional development. Focus group interviews provide benefits and limitations to the research. Focus groups are widely accepted since they are almost social in nature (Patton, 2002). The emergence of broad themes occurs in focus group settings due to the social nature of focus groups, where participants build upon each other’s expressions of knowledge. During a focus group session, it is quickly noticed when extreme views or inconsistency in responses are evident; and in one case I did follow up on an apparent inconsistency with the aforementioned first year teacher. The use of focus groups can pose a limitation though, since those that do not share the viewpoint of the collective may not speak up. Focus groups can also limit the amount of content that can be covered in a small amount of time since each participant must have their voice heard, which is why I deemed it necessary to engage in follow up individual interviews.

I followed Patton’s (2002) recommendation that a focus group precede an individual interview in order to ease participants into the notion of an interview. In one case, a participant appeared very nervous at the start of the focus group session and deferred the first question; later, in the individual interview, she was quite talkative and open. After transcribing the data of each focus group, I contacted the participants to determine their willingness to participate in an individual interview; appointments were made with four teacher participants from one school, and five teacher participants from the second school. All responded via email.
The interview took the form of a guided conversation to minimize variations in the questions asked to the participants. In each school site, I intended to interview between two and four participants, I had four volunteer from one school, and a five volunteer at the second school. I chose to interview a fifth teacher participant, the new teacher, at the second school because I was interested in having an ‘insider’ with an ‘outside perspective’. In total, I conducted nine individual interviews. The length of interview time varied from 40 minutes to one hour.

There are a total of eight interview questions that I used to facilitate the focus group discussions and individual interviews (Appendix A). The questions were derived from the literature. First, understanding the nature of professional development originated from Maloney and Konza’s (2011) discussion on the processes that create professional learning. It was important to understand the nature of professional development in Saskatchewan before I could understand the forces that impact it. Collinson et al. (2006) discussed that strong personal relationships might have influence on teachers’ professional relationships, this led me to question the impact that collaboration might have on teachers’ engagement in professional development. Bottery and Wright (2000) emphasized the importance of getting a broad picture of the culture in one’s understanding of organizations. I chose to ask about the teachers’ broad views of how they saw their colleagues working together to establish this broad picture. As teachers revealed broad pictures of collegial interactions, it was also important to understand how these interactions might affect teacher collaboration (McArdle & Coutts, 2010). The
tension of autonomy and collegiality discussed by Collinson et al. (2006) revealed that in addition to colleagues there would be more factors in teachers’ engagement, which led to my questioning of the factors of engagement. Finally, Kwakman (1998) shared that teachers act out their understanding of policies as they teach. Policy allows teachers to execute on the job professional learning if policy is in place. This led me to question the role of policy in teachers’ professional development. Each research question was addressed by two, and in some cases, three of the interview questions. The questions were created based on the literature mentioned above, then field tested on a pre-service teacher and a seasoned professional to ensure that they would be easily understood and generate rich discussion.

Each individual interview began with asking the teacher to share their teaching career path with me. I found this helpful in setting the participants at ease because they knew from that first question that I was interested in what they had to say, and not looking for a set of specific answers. Each follow-up interview consisted of asking participants to share their career path, followed by the eight standardized questions that every participant answered (Appendix A) as well as questions for clarification that involved participants’ responses from the focus group data.

**Informal Conversations**

In addition to focus group and individual interviews I engaged in informal conversations, which were not audio recorded, for the purpose of gaining insight into the culture of the school. The interviews included questions that pertained to the
demographics of the schools, the understanding of collaboration from an administrative perspective, and the demographics of the teachers. They were to aid in my understanding in the schools’ culture. One conversation occurred in August, 2011, with the superintendent that permitted my access to the school division, and another conversation occurred with the principal at one of the two schools. It was important to have the conversation with this principal because of my limited access to the research site prior to the focus group and individual interviews. The information that I obtained from him was similar to the information that I gained in the other school while sitting in the staff room and having informal conversations with the staff as they passed through. The information that I obtained included information such as demographics of the students, and population size of the teachers and students.

**Direct Observation**

Direct observation was used to enhance the understanding of the nature of collaboration within the schools. I employed direct observation since I was not a participant in the teaching environment (Patton, 2002). I used this detached perspective to focus on physical and social structures in the schools (Appendix B). For each of the two schools the direct observation process varied. The staffroom of the first school was a bustling area that teachers came in and out of throughout my time there. It was warm and inviting; it had chairs in the corners and a large centre table. The staffroom was the hub of the school joining the senior elementary side to the junior elementary side of the school. There were postings of information and general interest on the three large bulletin
boards. In the second school, the staffroom served as a holding place for the water jug and refrigerator. It was quiet; the room was too small to house many people or furnishings, so I had to go in search of the central location of the school, which were the teacher cluster rooms. I discuss the observations in greater detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

Direct observation was conducted in an effort to understand the levels of culture: artifacts, espoused beliefs, and underlying assumptions that are visible within the schools’ structures (Schein, 2004). For each school, I engaged in two sessions of direct observation. The first observation was in the staffroom of each school, the next observation was in the halls of the schools, and in the second school, it was inside a cluster room at the end of a teaching day. Direct observation allowed me to capture the context of interactions of teachers within these two schools. At each school, I engaged in a three-hour observation time prior to the focus group sessions, which included the aforementioned observations, following that, observations were approximately 15 minutes prior to each individual interview. According to Patton (2002), direct observation allows a researcher to be open to discover the setting of the research site instead of relying on participants’ concepts of the site. It affords the researcher the opportunity to see things that may be so commonplace to those being interviewed, such as routines or structures, that they do not mention them in the interviews. Direct observation circumvents these commonplace perceptions of participants and allows the researcher to understand the setting and the roles that people perform within the sites.
**Data Analysis**

I prefer the definition of data analysis that Stake (2010) provided: the process of taking data apart and putting it back together:

We do much of this work intuitively. We use common sense. We follow certain routines. We triangulate. We follow patterns of other researchers. As well as the patterns we ourselves used earlier. Sometime research is orderly—it could be more so—but deliberately inventive. Our work becomes centred on what we are finding, on our patches, but we come back again and again to the research question. (p. 134)

My research data were first taken apart through coding and then put back together in coding families. In order to establish structure, I created files for all of the data: one encompassing file for all of the pieces of data, then one file folder for each school site. I found this helpful in keeping the schools separate and clear in my analysis.

**Document Analysis**

Document analysis is an unobtrusive form of data collection (Berg, 2001). Documents are a form of social science evidence and the use of documents should support or refute the hypothesis of the researcher (Prior, 2008). I studied the document, *Guide to Effective Teaching Practice* (n.d.), based on content to determine the internal and external coherence (Hodder, 2000). The internal coherence checked the consistency of goals and outcomes for teachers as stated by the document. The external coherence weighed teachers’ biases against the document since original meanings are to be found in documents. This bias check followed the focus group sessions and individual interviews,
and allowed the researcher to explore multiple meanings of a context. The use of this document provided a fuller analysis of the professional development context because, as Yin (2009) argued, case study data should not be limited only to interviews.

**Focus Group and Individual Interview Analysis**

To aid in the understanding of the data, I utilized the technique of multistage data analysis (Kardos et al., 2001), which consists of writing a brief narrative directly following the data collection experience. In each narrative I wrote down the emergent themes and included responses specific to the research questions based on my observations and notes taken throughout the focus group and individual interviews. These narratives were helpful when I read and re-read the transcriptions because they provided the context of the interviews and presented themes that aided in the development of codes for data analysis.

I digitally recorded all of the interviews and transcribed them verbatim. During the transcription process, I made notes to form initial codes, and I wrote questions that I needed to answer from the data. After transcribing the data from the focus group sessions and individual interviews, I began within-case analysis (Creswell, 2007). I coded the data using etic and emic codes in ATLAS.ti, which began the process of ‘taking the data apart’ (Stake, 2010). Etic codes were those that related to the literature presented in Chapter 2 such as Professional Development, Role, and Collaboration, and emic codes were those of Enculturation and site-specific definitions for workshops. I coded each focus group using separate primary documents in ATLAS.ti, analyzing them as unique
entities. In both schools’ data analysis, to put the data ‘back together’ (Stake, 2010), I used broad themes from my research questions as family groups for codes that aligned with each question: Nature of PD, How and Why PD, Collaboration, Enablers, and a family group that housed codes related to School Culture.

Establishing Trustworthiness

The process of taking apart and putting data back together is ultimately to inform the researcher of the responses to the questions, to inform the reader, and to inform the literature by adding to the current body of work that exists (Stake, 2010). Therefore trustworthiness of research findings is of the utmost importance. Trustworthiness within a case study is dependent upon the whether the design is replicable. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated in their evaluative criteria that dependability of the research is in its ability to be replicated. I noted slight changes in my research design in my journal, such as changing the observation site to the teacher cluster rooms in one school, interviewing the new teacher at one school, and including the preliminary individual interview question that asked participants to share with me their career path. With these notations I believe that this research could be replicated.

Construct validity can be determined if a clear chain of evidence can be established within the multiple sources of key evidence (Yin, 2009). As I acted as the sole interviewer and transcriber, the use of verbatim excerpts in the analysis of the findings serve to enhance the credibility of this research. Credibility is simply having faith in the truth of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
Trustworthiness was enhanced through the multiple sources of data that I selected – direct observations, focus groups, individual interviews, and document analysis. As well, I kept a reflexive journal (Yin, 2009), where I noted a clear chain of evidence. For example, I wrote that in the second school it was necessary to observe the teachers’ cluster planning room since the staffroom did not serve as a central meeting place in that particular school.

Crystallization

The aforementioned forms of establishing trustworthiness can be understood through the process of crystallization. Crystallization involves achieving depth in research through the support of strong themes and patterns by the data that is gathered (Ellingson, 2009). Crystallization also involves understanding your data through more than one way of knowing through the use of multiple data analysis tools, a reflexive journal, and member checking. In my reflexive journal, I was able to acknowledge research biases and even my own interpretations of the data directly following the collection. I also recorded thoughts as I transcribed in order to clearly link the data to my research questions. With multistage analysis I described the broad themes that a preliminary read of the transcriptions and the brief narratives revealed.

As another way of understanding the data, I created a Venn diagram to show a direct comparison and contrast of the school sites and the participants’ cultures. I was able to see the similarities and differences of the schools’ organization of leadership, staff demographic, student population, and school floor plans (Appendix C).
As mentioned in the data analysis section, I chose to use ATLAS.ti and visual representation on paper, which I describe below. Once the codes from the focus groups were organized into family groups in ATLAS.ti, I put the broad themes to paper, finding it simpler to visually understand the themes. Using large poster paper, I placed each research question as the heading and colour-coded the data. Using this colour code, I conducted a cross-case synthesis (Yin, 2009) to establish connections between the two schools. I simply drew lines and wrote linking words between the two schools. Following the school connections, I wrote in the pertinent literature that relates to each question in point form; I numbered the etic and emic codes as they corresponded to the literature and, using those numbered codes, I placed the corresponding number beside the data to make connections to the literature.

For the individual interviews, I again analyzed each transcribed document on its own, and then grouped the codes in families according to the research questions. I then took poster paper and used the same colour codes, process of analysis, and key points of literature for each individual interview within each school. I sought out broad themes and commonalities between each teacher’s experiences. The use of ATLAS.ti software expedited passage retrieval for cross case analysis. This afforded me yet another way of understanding the data that were before me.

Crystallization is relevant in this study because no one truth is sought after; rather an understanding of the compilations of participants’ truths allow the researcher to arrive
at an understanding of the school culture, and more specifically how colleagues affect teachers’ engagement in professional development.

**Ethics Review**

In accordance with Queen’s ethics policies and the Tri-Council Guidelines, ethical approval for this study was gained from the General Research Ethics Board (GREB) at Queen’s University in May 2011, prior to the collection of data (Appendix D). I contacted the superintendent, potential school site principals and teachers of those schools using the sample emails (Appendix E). Once teachers agreed to participate in the study, a letter of information and consent form was given to the participants in the two focus groups (Appendix F), and another for the follow-up individual interviews was distributed to the participants prior to the occurrence of the conversations (Appendix G). As stipulated in the ethics guidelines, each participant retained a copy of the letter of information and consent form for his or her own records.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the case study approach through a qualitative lens. I also provided the reader with the process of data collection, the sampling procedure, and the many stages of data analysis. Within the section on trustworthiness, I discussed the method of crystallization used to guide the data collection and analysis processes. The next chapter presents my findings.
Chapter 4

Research Findings

The purpose of this research was to understand the role that colleagues play in teachers’ engagement in professional development in a large, urban school board in Saskatchewan. In this chapter, I present my findings. I begin with a brief narrative of each school site to provide the reader with background details and information to help frame a picture. I then briefly describe the participants and the similarities between the participants at the two schools. The findings are grouped by research questions. I use participants’ quotations to explain the nature of professional development, the purposes of professional development engagement, the role of collaboration in teachers’ engagement in professional development, and finally, I finish with the findings related to the enablers of engagement. Under each heading, I present the themes in rank order that the data revealed.

The School Sites

In accordance with the ethical guidelines for anonymity and confidentiality, I assigned pseudonyms to the first school, Michaele Jean School (MJS), and the second school, Adrienne Clarkson School (ACS). I had never been in either of these two schools prior to my study; I begin this section with excerpts from my field journal where I wrote narratives of my first impressions.
Michaele Jean School (MJS)

As I approach, it is early, and already there are ten kids outside of the school. It is a foggy grey morning and the day promises to be warm, but the brisk air bites at my cheeks as I step out of the car. Entering the school, I am easily led to the office where a bright and bubbly secretary greets me. Through the window, I hear the principal call my name; she is in her Roughrider gear and voices her sadness through laughter that she is the only one on staff dressed down and wearing her green. It is game day tomorrow. She tells me that she is in over her head but enjoying leadership; this is her first experience as the principal. Lists are scattered across her desk; she scans and finds the one that is pertinent to me – the participants for my research. She calls to them over the intercom.

In walks the first, Linda (a pseudonym), we meet and she whisks me off to her classroom where we discuss the parameters of the research. She hammers me with questions; I feel rusty but am thankful for her interrogation. She admits her interest is because of her own studies. Linda asks if the principal will be part of the study, I reply no, to which she replies, ‘good’. This comment sparks my curiosity but before I can ask, two more enter, Sarah and Georgia, also aliases. We begin by brainstorming a potential date for the focus group but are quickly stalled because of calendars and obligations. A soft chime rings through the speaker to signify the start of the day. The teachers leave, and I walk toward the staffroom to collect observation data. Walking through the halls, I notice that they are for the kids. The bulletin boards highlight student achievement; there are runners coloured and posted on the walls all over the school, I am told they are a Terry
Fox fundraiser. The halls are bright, where primary colours replace the putrid taupe that many schools use. This feels like a school made for kids. There are approximately 270 students, no buses; a few students are brought in by taxi cab for special programs. This is not a designated community school. I ascertain these statistics just by sitting in the staffroom and asking questions to those that wander through. The school seems friendly, and the staff and students are warm and cheerful. The resource centre separates the grade five through eight classrooms from the pre-kindergarten through grade four. The halls are almost sparse, but it gives the feel of a pared down look, not a feeling of emptiness. Things are clean, everything has its place.

**Adrienne Clarkson School (ACS)**

It’s Tuesday, I arrive at 12:55 for my meeting with the principal at 1 pm. I park my car on the road, which is jammed with vehicles that don’t belong in this neighbourhood. I wonder where the parking lot is for the teachers. I look up and see an old building, like something out of a scary movie looming before me. Behind it a new structure is growing and threatening to swallow the small, old school in front of it. I enter the front doors and am greeted by a staircase; go up or go down? I figure that up will take me to the school office. At the top of the stairs is a fish tank and I wonder who looks after it. The hallway is jammed with stuff. There are desks, old pictures of historical figures, the school goals are posted, and a whiteboard has the statement: “Happiness is a choice not a condition of our circumstances” with two exclamation points and a smiley face underneath. This school is buzzing. The principal pops his head out of the office and tells me that he’s
dealing with a nosebleed that won’t quit; he’ll be with me in a moment. While I wait, teachers pass by, all wearing jeans. They give a forced smile but I can tell they wonder who I am. I am thankful for this meeting with the principal; this school is bustling with activity and I doubt that I would know where to begin. I wonder where I will meet with teachers because this school is so busy.

The nosebleed is over and the principal and I meet over his lunch in the dank and tiny staffroom. Between bites he tells me that this school is over capacity, nearing the 360 mark, the school serves three community areas in the city because of recent school closures, meaning 70% of students are bused in. At least one quarter of their students are designated English as an Additional Language (EAL), here because of immigration or refugee status. The school holds middle class kids and children that need to be fed lunch because their families cannot provide for them. He mentions that single parent families comprise a large percentage of this school’s demographic. He gives me a run-down of the clusters that this school functions in: three grade classrooms that help to blur the lines of a grade eight student that reads at a grade four level; instruction that is focused where a child needs it. We continue to discuss how the change from one teacher – one classroom to clusters came about, his school was on the rebuild list and the new school will be an open-concept design. Three years ago the staff decided to be proactive and change their instruction to suit the new school. They began meeting at a teacher’s house in the evenings and discussing clustering the students. He finishes his lunch, wipes his mouth, and takes me over to the window to show me that the new building is inches away
from this crumbling structure so the kids are on a staggered recess. The projected move-in date is September of 2013, but he is skeptical, and threatens to retire if they don’t finish on time. We go for a walk through the school, he shows me how the stairs are crooked, the foundation is pulling away from the walls, the senior corridor slopes, and I wonder if I will make it out before it falls around me. Some classrooms are huge, the walls taken out to make room for a clustering of teachers’ desks in main rooms. The elementary kids move about like high school students from class to class. He brings me back to where we started and for the first time I notice that the staffroom is starkly empty, nothing on the walls, it serves as a lunch and water storage area, and teachers don’t come in here. I realize that I have not met one participant and, from the calendar in the hall, that the staff is conducting the focus group the day before parent-teacher interviews.

Busyness is a way of life in this school.

The Participants

Participating teachers from MJS had similar roles to those teachers within ACS. Coincidentally each participant at MJS had someone at the ACS that performed a similar role, teaching position, contract time, or stage of career. Both schools had participants that included itinerant teachers, seasoned professionals, novice teachers, and teachers that shared their contract time between two schools. Teacher participants at MJS had connections to one or more of another teacher participant at ACS, I share this information in the table below.
### Table 1

*Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Michael Jean School</th>
<th>Adrienne Clarkson School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deborah – Seasoned Learning Resource Teacher</td>
<td>Will – Ten year teacher, with various careers in his background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne – Seasoned teacher, Literacy and Numeracy lead teacher, 70% contract, new to this school division</td>
<td>Angela – Seasoned teacher, but only three years of experience as an EAL teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah – Novice second year primary teacher</td>
<td>Leslie – Seasoned EAL teacher at two schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia – Ten year primary teacher</td>
<td>Heidi – Seasoned kindergarten teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rae – Itinerant French teacher at two schools</td>
<td>Ashley – Seasoned middle years teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda – Seasoned teacher, but only two years of experience as an EAL teacher</td>
<td>Eric – Novice fifth year teacher of senior elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheila – Mid career senior elementary teacher</td>
<td>Miranda – Novice third year teacher of junior elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa – Novice first year on a permanent contract kindergarten teacher, second year at current school</td>
<td>Liz – Novice third year teacher of junior elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collins – First year teacher on a 70% contract</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the presentation of data below, I use direct quotations from the participants. The following legend explains the citation of those quotes. All of the participants mentioned in Table 1 above participated in their school’s focus group discussion. I separate each quotation by school name, ACS or MJS, whether the data came from the focus group (ACS, FG; MJS, FG), or individual interview, and then the participants initial, for example, MJS, IJ refers to MJS school, individual interview with Joanne. From MJS, I
individually interviewed Joanne (MJS, IJ), Georgia (MJS, IG), Sarah (MJS, IS), and Linda (MJS, IL), in that order. From ACS, I interviewed Will (ACS, IW), Eric (ACS, IE), Liz (ACS, IL), Miranda (ACS, IM) and then decided to also interview Collins (ACS, IC) because she was new and possessed an ‘outsider’ view of the culture. I interviewed the teacher participants from ACS in the order mentioned. All teachers’ names are pseudonyms.

**Findings**

Below I share the findings according to the four research questions I set out to answer. Each section includes excerpts from the transcripts carefully selected to give the reader insight into the culture of the schools. I present the findings as the order of frequency in which they occurred to avoid redundancy of the themes since in most sections similar themes appeared at both schools. When comparisons are made, or themes were specific to only one school site I took extra care to clearly label each school to avoid confusion between the two sites.

**The Nature of Professional Development**

The nature of professional development between the schools as perceived by the participants is separated into ten themes: individual activities, programs, ‘us versus them’, training, action research, involvement in a process, on-going development, mentoring, and book circles. Some of the themes contain viewpoints of teachers in both schools, while some are unique to the participants from one school site.
**Individual activities.** Teachers shared their individual professional development activities, thus this theme had the most codes because each teacher has his or her own area of personal interest in the teaching profession, which leads to a variety of professional development experiences. Individual activities that arose in the schools included inclusive education certification, Master’s studies, TESOL certification, teacher-led workshops, and Special Subject Councils. These Special Subject Councils are formed by the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation that organize conferences for each of the subjects that are taught in schools, such as Reading, Writing, Mathematics, and French.

**Programs.** Teachers from MJS seemed to engage in more out of school professional development programs. They identified professional development more with courses and with meetings that they either had to leave the school for, or attend on the school site, for example literacy and numeracy assessment meetings, a book circle about non-fiction reading, a socialization understanding program for at-risk youth, and workshops at the board office. The professional development in which the participants of MJS were engaged was highly personal. MJS participants sited ‘choice’ (which development to engage in), and ‘voice’ (a sense of being heard in the development and supported to attend that development by the administration), as key themes in the nature their professional development. Off-site, interest-based professional development that was academically driven was mentioned, “I tend to read professional literature on my own”; “We applied for a technological grant through the board to put technology stations into the one/two and two/three classrooms”; “I meet with other EAL teachers of the
division to brainstorm and share ideas and to be there as a support for each other”; and “my own French development needs to be done outside of the school, I have joined the Saskatchewan Association of French teachers and I am on the executive” (MJS, FG).

**Us versus them.** “Us” referred to the teacher participants at MJS, while ‘them’ are the board mandates that are placed upon teachers. This theme was unique to MJS participants. The focus group data from the MJS participants had over 30 comments of “us vs. them”. ACS had none. When talking about an upcoming program Sheila stated, “We have to wait for them to have it ready for us” (MJS, FG) with a sarcastic emphasis on ‘them’. While discussing changes in programs, Deborah said, “I think it’s the whole idea of getting on the bandwagon and they’re not being consistent and that really frustrates us I think” (MJS, FG). Rae piggybacked on Deborah’s comment, “Well they just jump from one thing to another so quick. And with the loss of our French consultant, he now has four roles” (MJS, FG), Sarah finished her thought, “and he doesn’t do any of them well. But it’s not because of him, it’s because there is so much on his plate” (MJS, FG). Sarah continued, “I find they’re constantly changing their idea of what they want… they almost do everything they can to chase you out of this profession” (MJS, FG). These comments revealed that MJS did not feel supported by their organization.

Sarah also talked of the leadership gap stating that the board was not “doing enough to fill the void” (MJS, FG). The participating teachers at MJS felt that professional development was “reactive rather than proactive” (Joanne, MJS, FG). Participating teachers at MJS expressed that “They don’t treat you like a professional” and, “it just
makes us resentful” (MJS FG) when discussing policies that surrounded professional development. The teachers at MJS saw professional development as something that was personal and passion driven, which resulted in the ‘Us versus Them’ mentality that pervaded the staff’s ideologies surrounding the board and the offering of professional development at the school board.

**Training.** Training was discussed in both schools as a means to attain skill for a particular need, as in Georgia’s case,

Training [are] things you need to do your job, like our attendance workshop where we learned to take attendance this way and you need to know how to use the system. Does taking attendance on my computer help me to be a better teacher? [She hesitates] Well maybe (laughs), but maybe not. Professional development helps you to be a better teacher. Training, like WHMIS, it keeps my kids safe but it doesn’t help me to necessarily teach them any better. First Aid helps me to keep them safe but it doesn’t help me teach any better. (MJS, IG)

Training was differentiated as a means to accomplish a task, not as a means to enhance teaching practices. Participants indicated that they were the trainers in certain areas and that this was beneficial for those involved in the experience and for themselves. Linda, from MJS, mentioned that she facilitated a writing training workshop for teachers, “I think that was a good experience for me, not everybody was on board but everybody had to attend to be trained. And I enjoyed training teachers” (MJS, IL). Miranda discussed her experience, “I’ve given some dance professional development … I’ve done some things
at conferences, which was kind of neat, I miss some of that” (ACS, IM). As further noted, not as many opportunities arise for Dance Education training because of the literacy and numeracy push of this school division. Eric also talked about his perspective of learning from his cohorts through watching videos of them teach, stating that not only was it amusing but it was helpful to affirm their efforts in the reading program, “seeing them teach was reassuring that we were doing things right like the other teachers” (ACS, IE). Training and being trained by other teachers increased enjoyment for teacher participants in professional development.

**Action research.** Action research in the form of student moderation at this school division is a mandate. Teachers are expected to administer and moderate three assessments per year in the areas of Mathematics and Reading. Throughout the assessment, the teachers administer the test, students remain anonymous, and then teachers come together to assess the students. They then have to record the data and adjust their teaching practices to help the students improve for their next assessment. Sarah stated that moderation helped her to understand student development (MJS, IS). It reinforced her expectations of her young students and increased her ability to be consistent in her evaluation. She shared that having the experience of moderating with a group of colleagues confronted biases that she might have had about certain students’ abilities. All teachers made mention of participating in moderation from both ACS and MJS as professional development.
Involvement in a process. Both MJS and ACS teacher participants identified being involved in a process, in these cases involvement referred to professional learning communities that had a specific goal. The focus group session at MJS discussed senior and junior collaboration times that were structured and scheduled on a bi-weekly basis, Linda explained in more depth the structure of the meetings to me in her individual interview,

We have our team meetings every week once a week and I’m part of the junior and the senior ones so I’m there for both. So that is at least 45 minutes a week but that doesn’t necessarily satisfy one teacher because it’s a group of people around the table and maybe there’s one student that has to be discussed from one classroom. But still, it’s a chance to share ideas to come up with an action plan to help that teacher or student. (MJS, IL)

The scheduled collaboration times allowed the teachers at MJS to share ideas and troubleshoot concerns about specific students.

ACS teacher participants discussed at great length in both the focus group and individual interviews their grassroots involvement of implementing changes within their school. Will explained that “A cluster might want to have a discussion about ‘how are we going to better deliver our numeracy program?’ So we would have some of those discussions” (ACS, FG). Eric elaborated, “We work together constantly, whether it’s dealing with discipline or planning for programs or even just getting recommendations and help on certain things. It’s gone from very limited to by the minute or by the hour
sort of thing” (ACS, FG). The teachers at ACS are involved in their process on a daily basis, unlike the teachers at MJS that must wait for their scheduled meeting times as they improve upon their teaching practices.

**On-going development.** The data revealed that ACS participants viewed professional development as a day-to-day undertaking. Professional development was described as a needs based, of the moment requirement. Teacher participants created their own support groups both within and outside of the school in order to meet their professional needs,

You can consider professional development to be your interaction with colleagues too, just running an idea by somebody, an extra set of hands, or any type of help, with that it happens 20, 30, 40 times a day. It’s all over this school. (ACS, IE)

Professional development was an on-going practice that didn’t remain in the confines of a workshop or a course; help may be in the next-door teacher’s hands if one were to ask. Miranda stated, “Even today, I saw the primary cluster meet, I’m seeing teachers meet all the time” (ACS, IM). Professional development was not only personal at ACS but it was school based and specific to the needs of the children they teach.

**Mentoring.** The formalized mentorship program no longer existed since it was largely an enculturation vehicle that was deemed ineffective as a program by this school division. Teacher participants also made mention that the formalized program was forced, and contrived rendering it ineffective (MJS, FG). “It’s interesting to note that this school division doesn’t have a per se mentor program for those coming in,”(Rae, MJS, FG). “At
one point, that’s at least nine years ago, there was a mentorship program. I was to be assigned a mentor and wasn’t, then the next year I took the role as a mentor teacher and it dwindled away.” (Georgia, MJS, FG). Though mentoring was not a program, teachers at both schools shared that they had relationships with teachers who had more experience than themselves and whom they turned to in times of need. Some teachers had mentors within their school; others had mentors who were teachers in other schools within the division (ACS, FG; MJS, FG). Both ACS and MJS teachers affirmed that mentor relationships were fluid, and that at times the role of the mentor and the mentee were reversed.

**Book circles.** The views on book circles varied slightly between individuals in both schools. Georgia expressed her concern about the relevance of her school’s book circles, “I’ve already done [that] book [circle] twice and it’s embedded in my teaching every day and I’m not sure I really want to do another one” (MJS, IG). In the same school, novice teacher Sarah shared that the book circles helped to shape her non-fiction instruction practices (MJS, IS). At ACS the teachers choose the books for their book circles rather than having them chosen by a principal. Miranda discussed her book circle,

I’m going to be in this book [circle] with the consultant, and a person from each cluster looking at writing continuums, we teach triple grade classrooms, which [developmentally] you do in any classroom but we [actually] have grade three, four, five in one room so we’re trying to play with different ideas there. (ACS, IM)
Both schools employ the use of book circles for professional development, but ACS had a site-specific interest in their book. The teachers at ACS were about to read a book about teaching in multiple grade classrooms, a topic that was highly relevant to the structure of their teaching model.

**Summary.** The data from these selected school sites showed commonalities and differences in the nature of professional development. Teacher participants from MJS and ACS engaged in individual activities that included certification, Master’s level degrees, training in teaching English as a second language, and other curriculum focused areas of interest. Teacher participants at MJS associated professional development with programs outside of the school, where teacher participants from ACS associated professional development with on-site needs. Both MJS and ACS participants saw and understood the differences between training and development. The teacher participants understood that training was something that one needed to do in one’s job while professional development helped one to improve in one’s craft. Teacher participants from both schools expressed a positive association toward training fellow staff members and being trained by fellow staff members either within their own schools, or colleagues who were from outside of their schools. Teacher participants from MJS showed repeated signs of an ‘us versus them’ mentality when it came to professional development. They voiced concerns over the consistency of professional development aims within this school division. Both MJS and ACS conducted board-mandated action research through teacher moderation of divisional assessments and all teacher participants mentioned this to be a
positive and confidence-building time. MJS participating teachers were involved in collaboration times at a bi-weekly meeting that was scheduled, where the participating teachers at ACS saw involvement on a daily basis as on-going and integrated into the day. I conclude that ACS teacher participants viewed professional development as a daily, on-going occurrence that was of the moment and team oriented. Neither schools’ participants indicated that much emphasis was placed on mentorship as a program, but participants from both schools’ shared their involvement in relationships that were akin to mentorship. The role of the mentor was seen as fluid and reciprocal in both schools. Finally, the use of book circles seemed to be common practice in ACS and MJS for professional development, though the selection of books varied.

**Purposes for Engagement in Professional Development**

Professional development is enhanced through self-reflection, collaboration, and collegial interaction but participating teachers indicated that they shared a variety of purposes for engaging in professional development. Below I provide the participating teachers’ reasons for engaging in professional development. They are: meeting a demand; networking; enjoyment; stages of life; leadership; avoiding isolation; voice; school-based professional development; confidence building; and observation.

**Meeting a demand.** First, as was already discussed, teachers engaged in training in order to meet the demands of teaching. These activities include things like taking attendance, First Aid training for field trips, and WHIMS safety courses (MJS, FG; ACS FG). MJS participating teachers identified passion to be very important in their
professional development prerogative, “For me, it’s about passion. And it’s about always wanting to be better, and looking for a better way to be more efficient.” (Georgia, MJS, FG). Improvement was seen as a necessity in the teaching profession with statements like “Nobody wants to do an ‘ok’ job.” and, “Yeah, that’s not ok” finally, “It’s something that if you feel insufficient in [an area of teaching], that’s your job if you don’t know anything about this, you sign up for those things.” (Melissa and Sheila, MJS, FG). These statements suggest that with the passion there are also unspecified pressures for the teachers to be good at what they do.

ACS participating teachers also identified overcoming a deficiency as a purpose for professional development, “My training is in high school so coming down to elementary, I feel like I’m just lost some days” (Collins, ACS, FG). Collins also stated in the interview that she would begin her Inclusive Education Certification courses in the winter. Leslie was taking TESOL certification in order to learn how to better teach her EAL students (ACS, FG).

In order to meet the demand of fulfilling requirements for promotion several teachers at ACS mentioned their Master’s studies. Both Will and Angela completed their Master’s prior to the study, Eric was partially through his courses, and Liz was about to embark. Linda at MJS was the only teacher to complete her Master’s. Several teachers at MJS suggested they were considering their Master’s studies for the future in order to fulfill the required steps for promotion within this school board.
Networking. Teachers at ACS identified networking as an important factor in their professional development,

As a kindergarten group, across the division, we would get together and share ideas, learn something specific … let’s say how another colleague would handle certain [issues in teaching] or maybe even have an idea on certain [aspects of teaching such as] a project or an idea. (Heidi, ACS, FG)

Will indicated that networking was an important factor in his engagement, “So you know, you do get the different perspective from what our profession is and the degree of diversity that is out there” (ACS, FG). He mentioned that it was interesting to understand the different struggles that teachers have in rural and urban settings (ACS, IW). Will explained that having a broader picture of education helped to inform his own practices.

Both schools had novice teachers on staff that mentioned interest in professional development if another staff member was participating: “Are my friends going, is Liz going to it?” (Miranda, ACS, FG), and, “I’m not shy, but I feel like if I know someone going to a workshop or something that’s outside of the school, you just feel that much more comfortable and willing to interact, that helps me” (Melissa, MJS, FG). Conversely, when I asked Joanne, a veteran teacher, who was fairly new to MJS, about her desire to know someone at a professional development experience, she replied, “No, at this point I’m confident enough in myself that if it’s something I think is important and will help me, I’m ok to go and do that” (MJS, IJ). However, in the focus group, she stated that, “One of the other reasons that I went was just to get to know other people too, being new
here and not knowing the system it would be an opportunity to find out more about it” (MJS, FG). This suggests that professional development can act as an enculturation vehicle.

Networking was a powerful purpose for engagement, “When I get the chance to meet with other teachers I see what’s going on in other classrooms, good ideas to try, it gives me motivation to keep on trying different things in my room, things that work,” (MJS, IS). Teachers wanted to engage in professional development because one could “get ideas” from networking with other teachers (MJS, IG). Linda shared her opportunity to meet with other EAL teachers in the city, “whenever we gathered it was so good, we could be together in a different setting and talk about what is happening in our schools and feel supported” (MJS, IL). Teachers networked to gain knowledge and support from their colleagues.

**Enjoyment.** ACS respondents discussed the role of professional development being a “power shot that gives some freshness”, “it boosts morale too” and, “it’s fun” (ACS, FG). ACS teachers discussed extensively the needs of the children within their school, “Your needs are just so different than a non-community school” (Angela, ACS, FG). The teachers expressed that understanding the students’ perspective was paramount to their ability to work with the demographic of students at ACS. Miranda explained, “When you’re dealing with the kids that we’re dealing with, you need [professional development] that’s targeted for at risk youth” (ACS, FG). This specific program that the ACS teacher participants discussed equipped them to handle the challenges that the
students at ACS students presented. They also stated that this particular professional development experience was “hands-on” and “very practical” (ACS, FG). These teachers shared that professional development that equipped them for dealing with at-risk youth was necessary and very useful for their school’s context.

**Stages of life.** The stages of life were described as having various levels of motivation for engagement. When teachers first begin their career, they are seen as idealistic and excited about teaching. Moreover, there is a hunger for knowledge in new teachers (Angela, ACS, FG). As Angela explained, circumstances change throughout one’s life, for example, children and a home-life become a priority and there may not be as much time to devote to professional development since many of the professional development opportunities occur after school hours. Yet another change occurs in a teacher’s life when time becomes free as teachers age and circumstances in the home change again, allowing teachers to take part in more professional development or return to school. Liz agreed with the stages of life being a factor when she shared about her rationale for taking her Master’s in her third year of teaching (ACS, IL). Will, a seasoned teacher, mentioned that he was able to take his Master’s because his children were at an independent stage in their lives (ACS, FG). Teachers from MJS agreed, Sarah divulged that is was due to her independent status that she could engage in further studies, and Georgia made mention of her interest in a Master’s because of her stage in her career (MJS, FG). It shows that timing in life is an important factor in engagement.
Leadership. The individual interviews provided more depth of teachers’ rationale of how and why they engage in professional development. MJS teachers discussed leadership more often than those at ACS. Joanne talked about the need for feeling supported by leadership (MJS, IJ), from her experience, those who promoted risk in a supportive environment asked critical questions and fostered growth through their unyielding support (MJS, IJ). The participating teachers at ACS did not mention their principal in our discussion until I asked. Once asked, they shared that he was a guiding feature of their practice, but didn’t share the same emphasis that MJS teachers put on leadership.

Avoiding isolation. Technology has potential to be a powerful tool in professional development, however two teachers mentioned that it inhibited their ability to engage. In both cases the professional development did not foster engagement. “At one point in a course I just gave up, it was five marks … people were just chatting [online] just to chat and I felt that it was drivel, it wasn’t meaningful” (MJS, IJ). Georgia communicated that teaching was isolating and if she were to take the time to attend a professional development activity, she wanted more than information transfer. Her desire was to be working with people (MJS, IG).

Eric, from ACS, voiced a comment similar to Georgia, he stated, “Sometimes, to be honest, if the kids are crazy and it’s a bad week, getting out of the school” (ACS, FG) is a reason for engaging in professional development. Eric voiced that leaving the school allowed him to take a break from the busyness of ACS and interact with other teachers in
order to exchange ideas (ACS, IE). For teachers, avoiding isolation seems to be a key to their feelings of survival in a sometimes hectic work environment with the high needs children that are within their schools.

**Voice.** Having a voice was an important factor in how and why two teachers at MJS engaged in professional development. Georgia described a favourite professional development opportunity where the teachers debated word use in the curriculum and had to support their ideas with research (MJS, IG). Sarah’s favourite professional development experience alluded to voice (MJS, IS). She shared that she enjoyed having both formal and informal discussions. These gave her an opportunity to fully explore the topic of interest, and she felt that it was the time when was fully involved in an experience.

**School-based professional development.** ACS participating teachers engaged in site-specific professional development because their school had shifted from one-teacher-one-classroom to a cluster style of teaching where doors were open and teachers moved to where there was need. As such, professional development in this school had to be focused on learning this new style of teaching. Eric described his learning experience,

> On our first day here as a team with this innovative way of teaching, we [were] downstairs with the consultants, the superintendent, and our principal, and I remember asking if there a manual on how to do this? We [felt] lost. And they said there is no manual, you guys are the manual, … you’re going to find the things that work. (ACS, IE)
As the participating teachers at ACS discovered, instituting changes became a large part of their learning experience and consistent discussions were the most helpful aspect of understanding their new roles as educators.

**Confidence building.** Miranda stated that she “came into this profession a little green” (ACS, IM). Professional development helped to build her confidence, prior to her one-on-one work with the school instructional consultant Miranda did not realize her lack of confidence. While working with the consultant and acquiring the required knowledge Miranda’s confidence and her preparedness to teach grew. Collins, a new teacher, built confidence through professional development because she was high school trained and “had no idea what these [elementary] kids [were] capable of” (ACS, IC). Liz shared that she was in a role that she had no training in, as such, her confidence grew as she understood key terminology that she was required to share with her colleagues (ACS, IL). Sarah from MJS mentioned that the action research and working with the on-site consultant helped her to build her confidence (MJS, IS). It was through working with others that Sarah was able to more fully develop her teaching skills. Professional development afforded these women the tools they needed to adequately present the pertinent information and hone their skills as teachers.

**Observation.** Participating teachers from MJS and ACS discussed the importance of observation for improvement. Joanne described how observation played a role in her teaching position,
There have been a few classes where I have just gone in and mostly observed so I could give the teacher feedback, because when you’re in the classroom teaching you’re thinking about your lesson that you need to deliver … I provide[d] some feedback for them about what I [saw] happening in the classroom and [gave] them some suggestions of how we [could] maybe change it up a little bit to keep [students] engaged. (MJS, IJ)

Miranda shared that observation is used at ACS as a means of quality control (ACS, IM). This quality control ensures that teachers are utilizing best practices within their classrooms, and participating in the shared vision of the school.

**Summary.** Participants from both ACS and MJS presented similar reasons for engaging in professional development. These teachers engaged in professional development to meet the demands of the profession, that is the required training that is needed to fulfill one’s role. Participating teachers also engaged in development to feed a passion that drives their purpose of teaching. For one teacher that was literacy; for another teacher, it was a social and emotional awareness building. Teacher participants at ACS mentioned networking as a powerful reason why they engaged in professional development. These teachers also referred to professional development as “a power shot” (ACS, FG), a morale booster, and a break from teaching in order to learn. Teacher participants at MJS identified engagement with having a voice in the experience, having face-to-face contact, and feeling supported by their leadership. Teacher participants from both schools revealed that professional development builds confidence in their teaching
practice. Timing regarding their stages of life was discussed as an important issue in how and why teacher participants engaged in professional development.

**Collaboration and Teachers’ Engagement in Professional Development**

Participating teachers from the two schools have presented many similarities until this point. The difference in school cultures became more evident in the findings regarding collaboration and engagement. The themes in the data are stability, extension of personal limits, dialogue, flexibility, future commitment and purpose, isolation, and readiness for change. Each is discussed below.

**Stability.** Focus group data from both MJS and ACS participating teachers showed that stability came from leadership positively supporting, validating, and modeling professional development. Leadership was identified as an enabler of collaboration, which according to teacher participants leads to professional development. “It makes a big difference if the leadership is supporting you and what you’re trying to do” (Rae, MJS, FG), “Supportive, positive … they create a whole atmosphere and it trickles down” (Sheila, MJS, FG). The previous administrator was highly supportive of the staff at MJS welcoming pre-service teachers with enthusiasm (MJS, IS). Leadership should not only be supportive of professional development aims but should foster an environment where one wants to improve instruction not for personal gain, but for the betterment of the whole school. Success can come be despite an administrator’s lack of support (Georgia, MJS FG); however, “it’s easier though if you are more experienced [because] you are
looking to that person for leadership and direction that’s when you have to have a strong staff who is collaborative” (MJS, IJ).

ACS teacher participants touched briefly on the attributes of their principal: “he’s a guiding feature”, “a father figure”, “he doesn’t tell you what to do but offers suggestions”, “he guides us in our own instincts”, “I cried in front of him at the end of my first week”, and “he’s non-judgmental” (ACS, FG). This suggested to me that he is very trusting of his staff’s capabilities. I believe that as such, leadership was not just attributed to the principal but it was shared throughout the staff. Will was mentioned as a leader in the focus group, and Liz, who is only a third year teacher, is the staff liaison for the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation. This staff also decided as a team to innovate their teaching, Will informed me that their plan for innovations came through evening meetings at a fellow staff member’s home (ACS, IW) suggesting that these teachers were partners in their school’s direction.

Another factor that supports stability in collaboration is having a team mentality. ACS teacher participants mentioned this team idea a few times throughout the focus group interview (ACS, FG). Miranda shared that professional development occurred on a daily basis through shared expectations, ideas, and similar work ethic (ACS, IM). Will agreed that daily on-going professional development was a result of the mix of novice and veteran teachers who are willing to try new ideas (ACS, FG).

The staff at ACS has a stable reputation throughout the school board. In the focus group, Leslie explained that she was excited to learn that she would be working with the
staff at ACS, in the past she was the sole EAL teacher at other schools and the collaborative environment that she had heard about at ACS meant that she would be part of a team (ACS, FG). Miranda also shared the warnings she received before transferring to ACS that teachers were constantly together and never alone in their classroom, but it did not deter her, she knew that the collaborative environment would be an excellent opportunity to learn (ACS, FG).

Heidi shared that the collaborative environment would be difficult to leave, “you might know the kids you’re about to get for next year and might think of transferring because you know it will be [a] difficult [with the students] but leaving the staff would be really hard” (ACS, FG). The team atmosphere seemed to permeate throughout ACS, the staff not only talked about it, but during observations they lived it. In one of my stops by a cluster room, the teachers were sitting at their desks that face one another, having a chocolate, and discussing an issue that occurred that morning with a child. The discussion was informal, almost casual, but discussions seemed to be present in the nature of the staff.

The physical layout of the school provides stability for consistent daily collaboration. Liz shared the necessity of having her desk in a group with others; it afforded her a personal work space while she remained part of the group practices. She stated that she couldn’t imagine teaching any other way (ACS, IL).

Stability is maintained in MJS through scheduled meeting times. Their classrooms are outfitted with a teacher desk for every room. The teachers at MJS have to schedule
time to meet, or wait for the bi-weekly collaboration meeting times to discuss issues. Linda explained the meetings to me in her interview that teachers, along with their principal, would come together to discuss interventions for students, and early on in the school year the teachers were asked to explain the role of the literacy and numeracy teacher for the principal since she was new (MJS, IL). The meetings always have a principal derived agenda, which is different from the previous principal, where one had to clear discussion topics with her prior to the meeting. The meetings would range from 30 to 45 minutes in duration and Linda explained that with both principals “it was problem-solving right there about a student” (MJS, IL) no matter who created the agenda.

Stability was apparent in both schools. Eric explained that the “[cluster groups] have the same time for planning, where other schools you have your own prep time. We’re all on the same page for what we’re going to plan for lessons and units” (ACS, IE). The staff at ACS had the physical structure and the location of their desks to allow collaboration to be a more organic process that occurred on a daily basis, where MJS had to make scheduled appointments to allow for collaboration to occur.

**Extension of personal limits.** Collaboration has the capacity to take what you know you can do and extend it. Throughout the focus group, the teachers at MJS touched on extending their personal limits, “we learn so much from each other”, “we build that trust”, and “I can learn so much from my colleagues” (MJS, FG). Sarah’s individual interview unearthed a deeper personal reason for collaboration, “Working with others helps keep me excited about trying different things, it helps to keep me honest and on
track with what I intend to do. When I can work in a team, [teaching is] easier” (MJS, IS). Sarah’s personal limits are extended through the joy of working with others; it allowed her to become motivated in her job. Joanne’s interview showed that she agreed, “collaboration, collegiality, I think that’s what keeps teachers motivated and moving forward” (MJS, IJ).

At ACS participants discussed collaboration as a tool to extend personal limits. Will shared that in his experiences one cannot absorb everything that they are presented, having colleagues there alongside affords a learner multiple perspectives, “Building on each other’s ideas, building on each other’s experiences, and taking from the [professional development] the parts that you think are important … I can see where that can be a benefit not only to my teaching, but also the students’ learning.” (ACS, IW)

Eric explained that because of the “different expert areas that people bring to the table, and different knowledge and backgrounds is very valuable. I’ve learned more here in the last three years than I would have in a different school with just one classroom” (ACS, IE). This extension of personal limits is helpful for first year teachers like Collins, “It’s not just your opinion or your experience, and I have so little experience compared to a lot of other teachers so it’s really good to have that expertise” (ACS, IC). Seeing the practice as shared was helpful for Collins to not feel alone in her teaching practices. Extension is reciprocal in participants at ACS, Miranda shared that she “was told through the
grapevine that [work together with the consultant] was beneficial for both” her teaching and the practices of the on-site consultant.

**Dialogue.** Dialogue refers to the interactions that teacher participants had and shared with me. Dialogue occurred in teacher talk and reflective practices with colleagues and was associated with feelings of openness in relationships with colleagues.

MJS participating teachers discussed the need for face-to-face interaction. Joanne stated, “I go in [to classrooms] with the attitude of how can I help you, recognizing that everybody is at a different stage and that’s fine. I’ve picked up so many good ideas from working with teachers. It works both ways” (MJS, IJ). This dialogue was reciprocal for the teachers involved. Varied experiences showed that as dialogue continues to open at MJS, and as teachers warmed to the idea of collaboration, trust increased (Deborah, MJS, FG). Teachers have a tendency to lean toward autonomy and “can feel threatened because they may have the perception that they were going to be judged… it is so very important that when you have collaboration that you feel safe in the room” (Deborah, MJS, FG).

As the staff began to share interest in improvement and development, Georgia could have her learning needs met within the school. Prior to these changes, Georgia was forced to join a council to find like-minded individuals and now because there are more teachers interested in professional development activity within the school, she has made steps to leave the council (MJS, IG). She talked at length about her collaborative relationship with Sarah, “Sarah and I would be like: what about this and what about that? And she would throw her two cents in. I think we developed mutual respect. She thinks
like me.” Georgia explained how she and Sarah were able to become grade group partners, “We spent hours together, and we talked every day. We’re like a married couple in some ways; she can tell me what I need to hear when I need to hear it.” When questioned further, Georgia stated that “We’re friends, we’ll be social, but we’re not living in each other’s pocket either. We have a sense of commitment so we both work hard and put in the time to accomplish things.”

Miranda and Liz at ACS had a similar relationship. Liz shared that being around the same age and stage in life has helped their relationship to grow deeper, “We work well together for those reasons and are able to take turns supporting one another with problems or issues that we’re having” (ACS, IL). Miranda explained that they were “open to learning from each other, not closed” (ACS, IM). She further explained that “We’re different, we have some similarities but we have opposite traits that mesh together very well” (ACS, IM). Liz shared that their open dialogue extends beyond just the two of them with the clustering, she explained a situation where the teachers were having behavioural difficulties with the students and though she felt she had a solution, the group had to come to a consensus. “We need to find something that works for all of us and something that we’re all willing to do… there isn’t someone one who says, ‘what I say goes’. We all have to be on par.” (ACS, IL)

The role that dialogue plays in collaboration within schools is the nature of the questions and reflective practice that the teachers engage in. Will posed the questions, “How do you know it’s doing what it’s supposed to do? We’re doing it, but is it better?”
Will explained the role of dialogue in the focus group, an example he shared was that “[The superintendent] brought us a resource and we talked about it a little bit, we absorbed it and kicked it around a few times and said, ‘yeah, this part is good but this part I’m going huh?’” (ACS, FG). The staff members at ACS were not afraid of asking themselves critical questions for the purpose of improvement through dialogue.

**Flexibility.** The notion of flexibility in teaching is important, but it is paramount for success in collaboration. MJS teacher participants talked about accommodating one another’s needs, and being open to problem-solving in the hallway. Melissa explained, “At this school I can definitely go to anyone of my colleagues in the hallway if I’m feeling panicky, worried, or have a question” (MJS, FG). This quote suggests flexibility while it sheds light on the differences from MJS and ACS. Flexibility for ACS is learning to work within a group dynamic, Will explained, “When you’re working in a group (a) everybody’s not always that comfortable and; (b) you have to rely on your colleagues to be able to say ‘this is the direction we’re going’ it’s not just your own choice” (ACS, IW). Will also stated that because of “the clustering of grades [that] means there is a tremendous amount of idea sharing that enhances what you do and how you’re teaching” (ACS, IW). As teachers at ACS shared ideas, they established a shared practice. Eric discussed flexibility as a trial and error lesson in learning, “For example, doing a cross unit, or cross subject thematic unit was too much too soon for us. We had to ease into it a little, finding out what works and what doesn’t was much better for us” (ACS, IE). This level of flexibility was being able to move with the ebbs and flows of school life,
knowing when to engage and when it is important to reflect. Liz further explained that the staff would do most things in their classrooms the same but if there was an area that anyone wanted to change they were welcome to do so (ACS, IL). Plans also existed in ACS for each teacher’s area of responsibility but they were free to trade those responsibilities (ACS, IL). Responsibilities may include trading classes based on areas of interest or expertise, trading unit planning responsibilities, and moving students from one cluster to the next in order to determine the best fit for both the teachers and the students. Flexibility supports collaboration. ACS participants felt that in a flexible environment where they are able to adhere to the structure while maintaining autonomy and decision-making responsibility allowed professional development to be second nature and habitual.

Future commitment and purpose. Because of the change in leadership at MJS, the participating teachers were apprehensive to discuss the future. Sarah provided the clearest answers as to why; she shared that the administrator changed right before the start of the school year (MJS, IS). She explained that it was chaotic due to the classroom changes and many people being unhappy with those changes. Due to the changes, a staff that she saw working together the previous school year was “splintering off into really small groups or working as individuals” (MJS, IS). She stated that “it was a different environment” and they were “just starting to get back on the same page with everyone again” (MJS, IS).
The participating teachers at ACS very clearly saw the new school behind them as their destination and future focus. They mentioned “growing pains”, “waiting to get over there”, and “[our instructional style] will make more sense in a building suited to our needs” (ACS, FG) when they discussed the new school site. When asked about the directionality of the school, Eric used a ship analogy, “certain things happen that you sway a little back and forth but we’re still going in the right direction … a common goal is next door” (ACS, IE).

At ACS, the clustering of students within three grade classrooms requires the teachers to make three year plans to avoid the overlap of curriculum. Each cluster has a semi-permanent plan that is submitted to the principal. If staff changes occur, the program is sustainable without significant overlap because of the long-term plans, which suggests a commitment to their practices and foresight into the future.

**Isolation.** Isolation played a lead role in disengagement for many of the teachers in this study. Sarah shared, “the times of the year when I feel most negative about my profession are when I feel like I have no one else to work with. I don’t work well when I don’t have someone to bounce ideas off of” (MJS, IS). She also mentioned, “If I’m just by myself, if I’m not learning from other people, if I’m not working with other people, I lose the bigger picture” (MJS, IS). Sarah also explained that isolation makes her “feel less confident in that I’m meeting my kids’ needs because I start to worry that I could be missing things. If other people aren’t aware of the work I’m doing, I feel alone” (MJS, IS).
Rae discussed the changes in her perception, “In [my first year here], people were working in isolation and it was everyone for themselves. And now we’re helping each other and it has made a big difference” (MJS, FG). Georgia had a similar experience, she explained how isolation affected her, “when I first started here I felt extremely isolated and looked beyond the doors for opportunities” (MJS, IG). Georgia told me that she considered herself somewhat of a geek, reading professional literature for the fun of it. This also led to her isolation in professional development because “the principal brought in a book today, (sighs) and I already read it. And some of the books that are being suggested, I’ve already done a book circle twice for them.”

Deborah outlined the role that isolation played in her disengagement, “Teachers are quite autonomous people and often teachers make statements such as, ‘I want to be in my room taking care of this’” (MJS, FG). She had been excited for a collaborative meeting but, because of the teachers’ desires to be in their classroom, she was left disappointed and frustrated.

ACS teacher participants also talked about the negative impact that isolation can have on engagement. Isolation was equated to survival, “People are so incredibly busy that it’s like you’re trying to survive in your classroom” (ACS, FG). Will explained the effects of isolation, “Teachers who live in their insular cocooned world are not as effective” (ACS, IW).

**Readiness for change.** A group that is working toward a common goal in true collaboration should be readily adaptable to change; however, the participating teachers
at MJS were at a point where they collaborated with others when it was convenient or comfortable for them. For example, in the focus group, the participating teachers at MJS discussed their passion for teaching, and looking for an efficient program. Since the principal change caused a shift in the school culture dynamic the staff was working toward getting their ideas and programs back on the track that they had set out for themselves at the end of the previous school year. Change was not mentioned; however consistency was, “consistency, just to make sure that the procedures or the rules of the classrooms remains the same, and knowing that every child can succeed” (MJS, IL). The participating teachers at MJS, like Sarah, said that were emerging in their comfort with change (MJS, IS), where the participating teachers at ACS shared that they were well versed in the need for adaptability, excerpts about change include: “I think we’d have to look for ways to make a change”, “how are we going to deliver a better numeracy program?”, “here’s what we’re doing, what do you think?” (ACS, FG). Though successful, teachers at ACS were so integrated that at times, they showed signs of balkanization against the rest of the school board,

I’ve heard other teachers say that no one wants to come here, no one is going to choose to come here, it’s a lot more work … People criticize because they don’t like change, and there’s envy because what I’ve learned here I know some people that I graduated with have never experienced this. Most of us will know when it’s our time to leave, but I could see us all going together. (Miranda, ACS, FG)
Miranda’s comment went uncontested within the focus group, which suggested that the staff was in agreement with her statement.

**Summary.** This section highlighted the differences in the two school cultures. I discussed the findings based on the themes from the data. First, stability at MJS comes from support from the leadership and scheduled meeting times; conversely, at ACS stability comes from a team mentality, a stable reputation, and the physical plant of the school with clustering teacher desks within classrooms. Second, extension of personal limits in MJS was mentioned but not seen. In ACS, the teachers talked about their work being built upon others’ work, and being able to contribute to a larger picture. Extension of personal limits was also seen as a reciprocal act at ACS. Third, dialogue in both MJS and ACS required openness and reciprocation. Critical friendships existed in both schools and had similar dynamics. Dialogue at ACS had a reflective tone where the teachers asked themselves consistent critical questions. Fourth, flexibility in MJS was flexibility in meeting times being in the halls or in passing; ACS staff was learning to be flexible within a group dynamic. ACS also worked with a trial and error technique as they problem solved what would work best within their innovations. Fifth, commitment to the future and purpose was not seen at MJS because of the change in leadership at the beginning of the school year. ACS was future oriented toward the new building, and their maintenance of three-year plans to increase their program’s sustainability. Sixth, isolation is opposition for collaboration leading to disengagement for teacher participants. All teachers in this study associated isolation with aloneness and ineffectiveness. Isolation
seems to undermine a teacher’s confidence and can lead to frustration on the job.

Isolation can come from having to survive, or having more experience than the staff around oneself but it remains ineffective for teaching practice. Finally, seventh, ease of change was not easy at MJS because of the new leadership that entered the school at the start of the year; teachers remained uneasy and unsure of their roles because of this change. ACS participants revealed that they were adaptable to change and understood that they were in a learning process through their innovations; however some symptoms of balkanization appeared in the focus group.

**Enablers of Engagement in Professional Development**

Teacher participants from both MJS and ACS offered similar perspectives on the factors that increase engagement in professional development. The enablers that presented in the data were attendance, timing, relationships, influence, policies, and interaction. Each is expanded upon below.

**Attendance.** The largest enabler in engagement for both schools was simply being able to attend a professional development experience. This attendance is discussed at length as the need for funding to allow for the release of teachers to attend professional development workshops.

“We’re really restricted now to what we’re allowed to go to because of sub[stitute] time. Like there [aren’t] a lot of sub[stitutes] available for certain things because … we applied for something and were denied” (Heidi, ACS, FG). ACS teacher participants felt that their professional development was hindered because of substitute teacher allotment,
when teachers are not able attend professional development it is impossible for them to engage. MJS teacher participants agreed, Georgia shared her frustration: “As a member of a council to attend the conference you have to apply very early and they take the first 20 people, despite sitting on the council I haven’t been able to attend the last two conferences” (MJS, IG). This alleged 20-substitute allotment presented itself as a reason for disengaging in professional development. Collins had a similar experience with a new teachers’ seminar that she thought would have been highly beneficial,

[The seminar] was a two-day thing, and I only work half days during those two days so [human resources] would have only had to have a sub for one full day and that was at the end of September and it was put on by the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation. (ACS, IC)

Her disappointment stemmed from the seemingly informative workshops and the networking that she missed. She mentioned that she booked three weeks in advance and was not permitted to go. Collins shared her disappointment that she had been turned down from three professional development opportunities this year because she “could not find a sub[stitute teacher]” (ACS, IC). Her yearning to be off-site for professional development suggested that a new teacher requires more off-site training to become properly equipped in their role, while a more seasoned teacher may require experiences that allow for on-site planning and collaboration. For example, Joanne, a veteran teacher mentioned that professional development is readily accessible with staff “if you’re more experienced” (MJS, IJ). Perhaps this accessibility stems from feeling confident with
one’s practices and therefore one is more apt to develop with colleagues in the larger context of the school once that confidence is built through experience.

The teachers at ACS cited substitute teachers as a factor for engagement in outside of the school professional development because, as Miranda stated, “you can’t leave these [students], the inconsistency makes it difficult to do it, so it’s more out of the building professional development that I don’t do” (ACS, IM). Because of the at-risk nature of the students at ACS, some teachers preferred to engage in school-based professional development. Miranda continued, “[School-based professional development] is discussed more, it underlines the importance, it is a lot more highlighted here than I have experienced at other schools. And it is continual professional development.” Miranda’s reasons for engaging were due to the consistent discussions that the staff shared, and how these discussions were continual and site specific. Miranda also shared a particularly engaging professional development experience that was on-site, in her classroom and involved working with a colleague in a subject area that she was not comfortable in (ACS, IM). The safety of her classroom, as well as the hands-on learning allowed her to fully engage in the experience. Engaging professional development has to be “relevant to what you need at that time [and] a firsthand experience” (ACS, IL).

Though it is sometimes difficult to leave the school, teachers from both MJS and ACS shared that off-site professional development was important. Accessibility was viewed as an enabler for engagement in professional development. MJS participating teachers also talked about the steady decrease of off-site professional development as a
lack in their division, “I found those options have dropped off almost this year and it has been a struggle to find things at the division level that don’t have an outside cost” (MJS, IG). Sarah explained “a lot of PD opportunities are [out of town], that are sponsored by the division, which is a challenge when I would have to take a day off of work to participate” (MJS, IS). Teacher participants at ACS shared that this was a frustration of engagement, for example, Liz shared that “a lot of the sessions are two day workshops [out of town] but I can’t miss a lot of school. I hate missing school” (ACS, IL). Teachers want professional development that does not take them away from their work too often.

Timing. Another area that ACS participating teachers discussed as a significant enabler is one’s home-life situation, Angela explained that commitments change as one ages in life and in the teaching profession. Liz, who is at a different life stage than Angela, explained that doing her Master’s now made sense for her because she knew that it would be a lot of work and her current home-life situation allowed for the extra work that Master’s studies require (ACS, IL). She shared that eventually she would like to have children and did not believe that family life would be conducive for her to study and work while also having a family. She further declared that as a third year teacher she was still fresh from her undergraduate experience and had a strong desire for knowledge.

A significant factor pertaining to time is the amount of hours in a day. Heidi explained that teachers’ “schedules are really packed already, so to have something else that is more addition to that, it is just too much for one person to do” (ACS, FG). Liz wished she could do more, but because of an already densely packed schedule, she
simply does not have the time to participate in professional development outside of school hours, with the exception of her Master’s studies (ACS, IL). Teachers at ACS do not feel that they have time for outside professional development because of the demands of the school. Ashley explained that she

…taught at two other schools before this, [and] was doing a lot more PD where I left [the school] for the day but again, it goes back to not feeling like you can leave these kids, if you are gone for a day or two they ask, ‘where were you? I thought you’d be here.’ (ACS, FG)

Some teachers discussed that having professional development on the weekends is helpful. Miranda shared that a Saturday PD session afforded her the opportunity to get to know fellow staff members better.

**Relationships.** As stated in the purposes for engagement, interpersonal relationships were a significant factor for engagement. It was mentioned that for novice teachers, having a friend was a purpose for engagement; it is also an enabler for engagement. Melissa from MJS stated that having a friend in attendance set her at ease, and Miranda from ACS suggested that if her colleague Liz was in attendance that increased her interest in the professional development experience. Collins shared her disappointment in not attending a conference “because a lot of my university friends would have been there and I would have liked to talk to them” (ACS, IC). Having and maintaining relationships is important for teachers’ engagement.
**Influence.** The enablers of engagement and how and why a teacher engages in professional development had significant overlap. For example, as mentioned earlier, voice was an area that allowed teachers to engage; influence is similar but specifically refers to the perceived impact that teacher participants feel when involved in a professional development experience. Sarah explained that her “most positive experiences with any type of development [was] one where [she felt] engaged in the conversation, where [she could] learn and contribute” (MJS, FG). In the follow-up interview Sarah reiterated this point, “Professional development that I couldn’t engage in [was] all [in the form of] information [transfer] and they neglected to open up the floor to have people share their own stories, successes, or challenges” (MJS, IS). As a novice teacher it was important for Sarah to learn from experiences, and to share her own expertise as it developed.

The teacher participants at ACS alluded to influence as an enabler of engagement. Will mentioned that he felt engaged when asked to be part of a group that was choosing between two Mathematics curricula for the school division (ACS, IW). Miranda talked about the innovations her school was undertaking and how that gave their school a louder voice to be “heard especially when it comes to professional development” (ACS, IM). The teachers at ACS did not view influence as an important issue, because they had a strong influence in their school’s power structure, and as leaders in innovation, they had great influence within this school division.
Policies. When asked about policies that the participants were aware of, the participating teachers from both schools mentioned four. The first was the policy regarding substitute teacher allotment, which I have discussed and will iterate here. As far as the teachers were aware, a 20-substitute teacher limit per school day per program offered exists within this division. For example, Collins mentioned that she was unable to attend a conference because of the limit of the allotted substitute teachers (ACS, IC).

The second policy mentioned was the allotment of substitutes for in-school professional development. Will mentioned that he preferred that he was able to develop with his staff while on site and in the school, it gave context and meaning to his learning (ACS, IW). Teachers agreed that it afforded them the ability to focus on areas of relevance for development within their school, and in the case of ACS, within their cluster style of teaching (ACS, FG).

The third policy that was discussed at length in both schools was the perceived arbitrary professional development tracking form that all teachers were required to fill in each year (ACS, FG, MJS, FG). Participating teachers from both schools disclosed that this program was a waste of time and not a genuine means of enhancing or contributing to their professional development (MJS, FG; ACS, FG). Georgia mentioned that she understood the tracking form as a means to decrease the amount of visits required by a superintendent; but, in her opinion, it was to enhance accountability in professional development practices (MJS, IG). Participating teachers from both schools shared that they were not certain on the location of their tracking forms, but would find them and fill
them out when required in June (MJS, FG; ACS, FG). Ashley described filling in the goals to align with the Learning Improvement Plan as “fake goals” (ACS, FG). The teachers did not feel that this was a genuine means of professionally developing.

A policy that supports teachers’ engagement in these schools is reimbursement. Eric explained that his Master’s tuition fees were partially reimbursed. Although the reimbursement is not the full amount it does ease the financial burden of course fees (ACS, IE). Teachers in both schools mentioned that allocating funds to professional development experiences was an incentive for them to participate (ACS, FG; MJS, FG).

**Interaction.** Equal engagement from all teachers in professional development was a theme that emerged from the data from teacher participants in both schools. In the focus group Rae mentioned that “when there’s equal engagement that’s a plus because I’ll be sharing something but I know I’ll be getting it back tenfold” (MJS, FG). Angela from ACS agreed that equal engagement increased passion for teaching (ACS, FG). She shared that during her training in EAL instruction a group of women would meet on Sundays to discuss different aspects of the program. She became very animated when she talked about it, “we were really nerds about it, and we were so incredibly serious about it but it was so good because someone else actually cared about it” (Angela, ACS, FG). Equal engagement further fueled Angela’s interest in EAL instruction.

The way in which teachers approach professional development is important, if they think that their actions are going to be judged rather than valued there is a decrease in engagement (Deborah, MJS, FG). Liz affirmed this when talking about her favourite
professional development session because the facilitators “made a really comfortable environment, which is good for any professional development session” (ACS, IL). A comfortable environment allows teachers to confidently interact with one another and with the material presented. The climates of safety, according to the participants, allowed all teachers to engage which enhanced their overall experience.

Face-to-face interaction was mentioned in the section how and why teachers engage in professional development. It was an important enabler for engagement also. Teachers from both schools felt that technology slowed the process of development. Will explained that the shift from paper catalogues to online professional development catalogues cut down on the amount of professional development sessions that he attended (ACS, FG). Teachers equated the downfall of technology in professional development to the lack of human interaction (MJS, IG; MJS, IJ).

**Summary.** First and foremost, in order for teachers to engage, teacher participants declared that they must first be given the opportunity to attend the professional development experience. Attendance may come through substitute teacher allotment, feeling released from one’s classroom duties, the allotment of funds to support professional development experiences, its location or accessibility, or teachers’ stages in life. An important enabler is relevant and context specific professional development. Participating teachers asserted that experiences that were hands-on, practical, or on-site were highly effective development activities. The need for on-site professional development increases as the years of teaching experience increases; novice teachers
require more training and that most often occurs at conferences or workshops. Influence proved to be a greater enabler for engagement in the teaching staff at MJS possibly because ACS was innovating change and was a leader in the school division. Being a leader in the school division meant that they had perceived significant influence and therefore did not see it as something that needed highlighting. Participating teachers mentioned four policies that related to their professional development, including substitute teacher allotment, on-site substitute release time, a professional development tracking system, and reimbursement. These policies were viewed in both a positive and negative light; some were seen as enablers, such as the policy of reimbursement and the policy of in-school release time. However, participating teachers from both schools shared examples where the number of allotted substitute teachers had maximized and they were therefore unable to attend a session or conference, inhibiting their participation in professional development. Most negatively viewed was the policy on professional development tracking. The teacher participants indicated that it was a contrived form of accountability that did not further their learning or their professional goals, they mentioned that it had no significant impact on their engagement in professional development.

Teachers at both schools revealed that engagement increased when there was equal engagement from all parties. If many were benefiting and interested then involvement was also high; conversely, in situations where technology was not used to its fullest potential, engagement significantly decreased. Teachers at both schools wanted a face-to-
face experience with professional development. Finally, a safe environment allowed teachers to feel comfortable to learn and improve.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I discussed the four major themes that the data revealed. I first discussed what was learned about the nature of professional development in MJS and ACS schools. Second, I discussed how and for what purposes the teachers in this study engage in professional development. Teachers in this study presented several factors of engagement including a determined need, a safe environment, having goals, feeling a sense of ownership, and seeing progress take place as a result of their learning. Third, I discussed the role of collaboration in professional development engagement. The data revealed that the participating novice teachers require more support from their peers, but affirmed that their peers are also an integral part of their learning, as they become more seasoned professionals. Collaboration increased confidence and abilities in teachers. I concur with teachers’ comments on the role of isolation in engagement, namely that isolation is a significant factor in disengagement for teachers. Isolation erodes confidence and collaboration therefore placing success further from a school’s reach. Fourth and final aspect, I provided an overview of the considerations of the enablers of engagement that the teachers shared with me. Participating teachers revealed that time was of the utmost importance when it came to their engagement, either through the timing of the experience, for example, after school, or their stage in life, be it just starting their career, in mid-stride of their career, or nearing the end and wanting to maintain a high level of
learning. In the final chapter, Chapter 5, I discuss these findings and present conclusions and implications of this research.
Chapter 5

Discussion, Implications, and Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the relation of findings from the analysis of the collective case to the relevant literature. I begin this chapter with an overview of the study, including the purpose and research questions, research design, data collection and analysis. Each research question is discussed and linked to the pertinent literature; in doing so, I share the significance of culture in the two school sites. Despite the fact that I have alluded to the schools’ cultures in preceding chapters, in this chapter I attempt to shed light on the ways that culture impacts its participants. I conclude this chapter with implications for theory, practice, and further research, and close with some reflections.

Boundaries of the Collective Case Study

Here I provide a brief recapitulation of the entire study in order to provide the reader with the context for the following discussion. I start with an overview of the purpose, research design, data collection, and analysis.

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to understand the role that colleagues play in teachers’ engagement in professional development. The guiding question for this research was: How do colleagues play a role in teachers’ engagement in professional development? The following questions were instrumental for the facilitation of this study, providing clarity and focus:
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(1) What is the nature of professional development in selected school sites in Saskatchewan?

(2) How and for what purposes do teachers engage in professional development?

(3) What role does collaboration play in teachers’ engagement in professional development?

(4) What are the enablers of teachers’ engagement in professional development?

In order to answer these four questions I used document analysis, direct observation of the school sites, focus groups, and follow-up individual interviews.

**Research Design**

I chose to use a collective case study research design. A qualitative approach made it possible to allow for multiple perspectives to be viewed (Stake, 2010). The two school sites that I chose included one school that the school board perceived to be working toward becoming more collaborative, and one school that the school board perceived to be collaborating at a high level. I wanted to examine the organizational cultures as understood by teachers in those schools, highlighting both their similarities, and their differences. The data were enriched by the participants’ abilities to expound on their experiences in professional development. These experiences allowed the data to be personalistic (Stake, 2010) as I sought to understand the participants’ responses to the research questions. I thought my research questions were simple; however, as the study
progressed, I agreed more and more with Creswell (2007) that the ‘thing’ I was studying was complex, and a case study was the best method for a novice researcher, like me, to choose.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

I collected data from October through December of 2011 in two schools. MJS was selected since it is working toward becoming a more collaborative school; ACS was selected because it had been perceived to be a highly collaborative school staff. I conducted a focus group of eight teachers at MJS first; I audio recorded the focus group and then transcribed the interview verbatim. Following that, I conducted follow-up individual interviews with four teachers from that focus group. I audio recorded those individual interviews and transcribed them verbatim. I then conducted a focus group with nine teachers at ACS, which I audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. I then conducted follow-up individual interviews with five members of the focus group, one who was a new teacher.

After all interviews were transcribed and edited to ensure their accuracy, I began the lengthy process of coding the data. I started with the focus group interviews coding the data using etic and emic codes. I then analyzed the focus group data from each school side by side to confirm common themes and differences between the two schools. Following the focus group sessions, I then coded all of the individual interviews from MJS participants, and compared those results. I coded the interviews from ACS and compared the results by participants within that school, after which I compared both
schools’ interviews in a means of cross case analysis (Yin, 2009). I chose to analyze the data based on the research questions provided to allow for the clearest and least ‘messy’ way to comprehend the data and thus to maintain focus on the research questions.

Discussion

It was a challenge for me to know what to document in terms of the differences in culture. In both schools, the implicit culture was not overt, and it took time to gain access to some underlying assumptions that the teachers held as a collective. I did learn that the phenomenon of professional development and the context of the culture were not easily separated (Yin, 2009). I share the phenomenon and the importance of the school cultures in the analysis below.

Nature of Professional Development in Selected Schools in Saskatchewan

The analysis revealed that professional development in Saskatchewan is much like the description of the notion that exists in current literature (Colbert et al., 2008; Day & Sachs, 2004; Morewood & Bean, 2009). The themes that surfaced throughout analysis aligned with the different forms of professional development that Guskey (2000) outlined. Participating teachers in MJS and ACS saw and understood the differences between training and development. They identified training as that which one was required to do one’s job whereas professional development was honing one’s skill. On each staff, teacher participants expressed having a positive experience training staff and being trained by staff members, as well as experiences teaching colleagues from other schools. As part of participating teachers’ professional development, members from both
MJS and ACS had high levels of continued education either through Master’s level degrees, training in English as a second language, or special needs and inclusive education certification.

MJS teacher participants engaged in a bi-weekly meeting that was scheduled and specific to either senior or junior elementary teachers. ACS teacher participants saw involvement on a daily basis that was integrated into daily practices, routines, and the physical structure of the school made this more plausible. These daily practices, along with the physical structure mirror the findings of Doolittle et al. (2008), that teachers require sufficient time and space in order to develop professionally.

Jaipal and Figg (2011) reported that action research is a useful tool to increase communication within schools. When teachers engage in action research, the environment becomes one of risk taking and open-mindedness. Participants from both ACS and MJS identified board- mandated assessment moderation as beneficial by increasing the confidence of teachers through conversation and sharing in the moderation.

Participating teachers from MJS and ACS discussed informal relationships similar to mentorship but there was not a significant amount of emphasis, both division-wide or in the schools, for a formalized program to be in place. However, the informal relationships akin to mentorship in both MJS and ACS were seen as fluid and in some instances reciprocal in nature—where roles may change based on one’s knowledge, experience, or success in an area.
The data showed that participating teachers at MJS viewed professional development as programs and made repeated references to an ‘Us versus Them’ mentality. The teachers did not feel consistently supported by their board office, and felt as though their efforts were not always acknowledged. Their lack of support could lead to disengagement (Saks, 2006). ACS participating teachers viewed professional development as an on-going occurrence that was of the moment, relevant to their specific situation, which was team oriented. The participants of ACS were part of a learning community (Schlechty, 2009). The teacher participants had a well-established culture that fostered respect, mutualism, and trust (Crowther et al., 2009). ACS teacher participants consistently asked questions suggesting that their school had a culture of inquiry (Nelson, 1998). This culture of inquiry revealed that (whether the teachers are aware of it or not, though none seemed to be aware of it in the interviews or focus groups), their practices align with the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation (2006) document.

The key organizational structures that need to be in place for teachers to engage are: leadership, creativity, values and vision, supportive conditions, and shared practice (Hord, 1997, as cited in Doolittle et al., 2008). Both schools have shared values and a shared vision; however the participating teachers at ACS had an easily accessible shared vision through their innovative practices. The physical layout of ACS school created common practices, which enhanced the shared vision at ACS.

Both MJS and ACS participants revealed that their schools had a supportive environment. The participants at MJS gained support from their peers as they navigated a
change in leadership, where ACS participants had a principal that trusted in their decision-making ability. The staff at ACS not only had strong leadership but also looked to themselves as leaders, sharing the onus of the vision of the school. The staff at ACS shared practice with their cluster organization and physical structure. They shared responsibility, students, ideas, and resources with one another.

The discussion in the focus group session at MJS quickly became negative when sharing about their view of professional development and their school board. The teachers mentioned that they did not feel supported in their professional development. It became positive again once participants made mention of the collegial support within their school. This suggested to me that within their school, the opposition of the board office was an underlying assumption that many of the teachers have on this staff. This is a key indicator of the school’s hidden culture. This attributed to their culture, though not thin; it was not as thick as the culture that ACS possessed.

The nature of professional development at ACS is engrained within a culture of survival. An underlying assumption here is that one will “work like a dog and love it” (ACS, FG). Change was also seen as a valuable and beneficial process in their teaching. They talked openly that professional development was a necessity for them to be able to innovate in their three grade classrooms, and their survival as teachers. They were confident about their need for professional development and that it occurred daily.

The participating staff at ACS revealed that they were goal oriented, involved in group decision-making, were involved in innovative practices, evidenced distributed
leadership in all staff members, and shared a climate of cooperation (Engels et al., 2008). Their culture was thick throughout the members that were part of the focus group and follow up interviews. As Schein (2004) stated, thick cultures can become too stable and unwilling to accept change, unless a learning gene is well established. In the case of ACS, their ability to ask critical questions and remain open to change kept their thick culture from becoming too thick. Because of the innovative practices at ACS the entire staff had adopted the role of learner guaranteeing that the learning gene was well established. I found ACS participants to be in alignment with the six points of engagement (Jurasaite-Harbison & Lex, 2010), indicating that the school would also be in that alignment. Their classrooms are set up so that teachers’ desks face one another and they have common preparation time devoted throughout the week in order to meet. They have adopted a school wide policy of innovative practices, which all teacher participants were practicing. They had clearly outlined that the notion of ‘one teacher, one classroom’ was outdated in their school and have worked toward adopting a team approach to teaching. The teachers within the school were encouraged to participate in professional development and serve as examples for implementing innovative practices and teachers from other schools came to watch them teach in order to emulate those practices. Participants at ACS determined that professional development was a key to their understanding of the demographic of students with which they interact on a daily basis. The majority of teachers sited the professional development experience that gave them greater knowledge of youth at risk as pivotal to their ability to be in that particular school environment. ACS teachers,
because of their close proximity and shared workspace, have all adopted similar practices and a common understanding of the school policies surrounding their innovative practices (Nicolini & Meznar, 1995). Participating teachers at ACS have a deep understanding of what it is they are doing and why it is important. This understanding reveals that ACS is involved in the long-term, organic process of organizational learning (Collinson et al., 2006).

Participants from both MJS and ACS claimed that knowledge was easily transmitted, suggesting that both schools had thick cultures (Nelson, 1998). Participating teachers in both schools could quickly identify where to gain necessary information and from whom to gain it. Both schools had thick cultures, but as discussed, ACS had a learning gene embedded which made it a thick learning culture with a well-established learning gene (Schein, 2004).

**The Purposes of Engagement in Professional Development**

ACS and MJS participating teachers presented attributes of Adult Learning Theory (Knowles, 1980). Teachers expressed need, a safe environment, goals, ownership, and progress as requirements for professional development. Professional development was viewed in both schools as an experience that should enhance their work (Day & Sachs, 2004).

Teachers in this study discussed their engagement in professional development for the purposes of meeting their needs as professionals, and attending training workshops in order to better equip themselves (Guskey, 2000). Teachers engage in professional
development to feed a passion and to network with other teachers. ACS participants viewed professional development as a way to boost their staff’s morale. Participating teachers from both schools shared that confidence in practice is a result of professional development. Timing was seen as an important reason for how and what purposes a teacher engages in professional development. This could be the actual timing of a professional development experience, for example, right before report cards, or time in one’s life, near the start or end of their career, or their stage in family life.

Teacher participants from MJS specifically identified experiences of high engagement with those activities that allowed them to have a voice in the activity, have face-to-face contact, and when they felt supported by their administration to do so. Voice, contact, and support are a portion of the enablers identified by Turbill (2002). However, the teachers, I contend, had an underlying assumption of the ‘us versus them’ mentality that stemmed from their perceived lack of support in developing professionally (Saks, 2006). Teachers at MJS engaged whenever they felt supported, whereas the staff at ACS consistently felt supported, showing that a thick supportive culture is a foundation for engagement (Glover & Coleman, 2005). ACS participating teachers asserted that they were being worked with, instead of worked on (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990) and this led to a higher level of engagement (Morewood & Bean, 2009). Participating teachers from ACS also expressed that they were partners with their school division as they practiced innovations; this partnership is a sign of engagement (Wolf et al., 2009).
**Role of Collaboration in Professional Development Engagement**

Steiner (2000) presented eight points of collaboration: stability, flexibility, extension of personal limits, a lasting impact, dialogue, commitment to the future, commitment to purpose, and ease of change. Stability at MJS came from support from the leadership and scheduled meeting times. Stability at ACS was attributed to a team mentality, stable reputation, and the physical plant housing open-concept rooms and clustering of teachers’ desks.

Flexibility at MJS was viewed as their meeting times in passing and in the hallway, where one teacher remained the head in one classroom. ACS teacher participants differed; they were not only flexible in their meeting times, but flexible in their classroom practices, showing that team teaching and cluster discussions guided their days. ACS teachers, both participants and non-participants as stated by the participants, were problem-solving their innovations of how to make this practice work to the best of their capabilities consistently after three years of practicing it.

While extension of personal limits was not observed at MJS, teacher participants described building upon others’ work and seeing the importance of a larger picture while working toward it in partnerships or small groups. Extension of personal limits was seen as a reciprocal ideal at ACS, participants also partook in building on one another’s work and seeing the impacts that participation had on the original creator of a concept.

Dialogue in both MJS and ACS was seen as open and reciprocated. Critical friendships existed in both schools and had similar dynamics of support and challenge.
ACS teacher participants took dialogue one step further and had a reflective tone in their conversations where they felt comfortable to critique and ask critical questions of curriculum and one another.

Commitment to the future and commitment to purpose was not observed at MJS because of the change in leadership at the beginning of the school year. ACS was future-oriented toward their new building; it was seen as a destination, and they were preparing for the transition upwards of three years ago. The staff maintains three-year plans in order to aid in the sustainability of the program ideals.

Ease of change was not easy at MJS. New leadership and brisk changes at the beginning of the year showed signs of isolation for the staff. The teachers were uneasy of their roles because of the change and were therefore looking for stability rather than more change. ACS was found to be adaptable. The staff understood that their learning process was a journey and things that needed changing were easily accessible because of their openness of dialogue and the trust that the staff expressed. Learning processes at ACS maintained the fundamentals of a Professional Learning Community, as the school navigated change, their supportive network helped foster and expand the changes (Mullen & Schunk, 2010). At first glance, some symptoms of balkanization seemed to appear at ACS, but it was not within the staff, rather within the division. The teacher participants knew that they were in a high energy and highly dynamic school and their commitment to the program could be seen as zealous within the school division. Balkanization was described as having novice roots, and that little guidance was provided to the teachers.
(Kardos et al., 2001) however this was not the complete case. The teachers were open and willing to allow anyone come in and learn from them, which included my presence within the school.

**Distributed, complementary, and integrative collaboration.** In Chapter 2, I discussed the types of collegial collaboration posited by Steiner (2000). The three types are distributed, complementary, and integrative. Distributed collaboration is when people are working in partnerships or small groups while striving toward a common goal. I identified MJS with distributed collaboration; people worked in partnerships or small teams toward improving teaching practice but not necessarily seeing the whole school as a platform of improvement. This identification was consistent with the perceptions of the Directors at this school division, because teachers at MJS were in transition toward becoming more collaborative within their practices. Development at MJS occurred in distributed collaboration as teachers worked on areas of interest or personal need. This may be due to the leadership change as teachers were reestablishing their roles, or it could be that they were forging new habits of learning to improve as they established a shared vision for the school.

Teachers in ACS showed aspects of both complementary and integrative collaboration (Steiner, 2000). They discussed sharing unit plans as a means of lessening the work load, which comes with teaching in clusters, but they also shared how discussions about struggling students were a shared experience and seen as a shared
responsibility. These forms of collaboration revealed their high attentiveness to and absorption of their prescribed roles (Saks, 2006).

ACS had altered its structure in selective innovative ways. According to Fullan (1999), selective innovations are an important aspect of a collaborative school. Being specific and focused through action research on areas of improvement allows for an environment to continuously improve; ACS participants worked on personal improvement while enhancing the group (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996).

**Isolation.** Thin school cultures develop because teaching can be very isolating (Lortie, 1975); however, in both schools participating teachers said they fought against isolation. Working alone and with a focus on the status quo may lead to a lack of vision for the future of the school. Isolation leads to disengagement, which according to Shernoff et al. (2011) decreases teachers’ job satisfaction. Isolation was equated to disengagement for the teachers in this study. Confidence erosion, and ineffectiveness were descriptors participants used when commenting on isolation. Many teachers mentioned that isolation was frustrating and in direct opposition to their capabilities as teachers. The Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation (2006) document and the innovations that this school board was undertaking have set collaboration as a goal for their improvement. Fullan (1999) stated that having collaboration as a goal allows for success to be attained within schools. As ACS continues to come together and as MJS works more and more toward coming together in collaboration, success for their school appears to be within reach (Goddard et al., 2007).
Enablers of Engagement

The thick culture at ACS highlights the points of engagement put forth by Jurasaite-Harbison and Lex (2010). The school’s physical and social environment promoted interaction; the teacher participants at ACS are in constant communication within their cluster groups. The institutional policies have changed throughout the years but the stable environment of collegiality is maintained to a high degree in ACS. A majority of participating teachers at ACS choose to develop within the school because of time constraints and the needs that are within their school. At ACS, the leadership is said to be shared amongst the teachers, novice and seasoned alike; with that sharing, a common understanding prevails of what is to occur at ACS. All of these points align with engagement in professional development.

Teacher participants shared that accessible professional development comes from competent substitute teacher allotment. Participants communicated that a personal release from one’s duties and an allotment of funds was necessary to feel supported in one’s professional development endeavours. Other factors mentioned that created accessible professional development were the location, either on site, off site at the board office, and finally through one’s stage in life.

Teachers in this study mentioned that relevant and content specific professional development was a reason for engaging in professional development in alignment with Shernoff et al.’s (2011) findings. Hands-on, practical, in situ experiences were seen as highly effective activities. Seasoned teachers and novice teachers differ slightly in their
perceived needs for engagement, seasoned teacher participants favoured more on-site professional development, where novice teachers mentioned that more content training was needed which occurs more often at conferences or workshops held outside of the school. Teachers also spoke of the importance of a safe environment, no matter where the development occurred, as a necessity to learn and fully engage in professional development.

In both the focus groups and the individual interviews, I asked the teachers about policies that they were aware of that impacted their professional development. Here I discuss two policies that were mentioned frequently; the first was a recording system for their professional development (Administrative Procedure, 2007). Most teachers in the study claimed that this recording system was an effort to increase efficiency and limit the number of and need for superintendent visits to a school. The participating teachers from both schools stated that the recording system was not helpful or a meaningful part of their professional growth. Like the findings of Bottery and Wright (2000), teachers understood this recording system to be a form of management and top-down enforced professional development. It was perceived as a contrived recording system that most teachers in this study found to simply take up space on their shelves that neither enabled nor inhibited engagement.

The second policy that the teachers mentioned was the allotment of substitute teachers. Teachers in this study alleged that a 20-substitute allotment per external professional development day exists. Through examining the Administrative Procedure
(2008) no such details were found, nor are those details published within this school division. It may exist, but I reiterate, it was not published within this school division’s administrative procedures.

Teachers in this study were not aware of the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation document (2006) that outlined the methods and purposes for professional development. Teachers were naturally engaging in reflective practices and looked for ways to improve their teaching craft, but they were unaware that this was a current policy set out by their school board. The Continuous Improvement Framework was not mentioned. However, participants from both ACS and MJS mentioned the Learning Improvement Plan. Discussions around the Learning Improvement Plan were varied; one teacher at MJS stated that she felt empowered when being called upon to draft the school’s plan, but teachers at ACS had an alternative view, they were told to make their personal goals align with their school’s Learning Improvement Plan and essentially copied the goals into the recording system, rendering their development goals useless because they inhibited holonomy (Costa & Garmston, 1993).

Influence at MJS was mentioned as a significant reason for engagement. The participating teachers talked at length of their need to feel that their opinion was relevant and of importance. Perhaps influence was not as great of a need at ACS due to its structure of innovating change and being seen as a pioneering school in this division.

Teacher participants from both ACS and MJS suggested that engagement was attainable when there was equal participation and engagement. When teacher participants
observed others benefitting and enjoying their professional development experience, personal involvement was mentioned as increasing. Teachers stated that they were disengaged mostly when technology was not used to its fullest potential, in online courses, electronic pin boards, or chat rooms. Teacher participants from both schools declared that they preferred face-to-face contact when involved in a learning experience. This suggests that teachers do have an impact on one another’s engagement in professional development experiences.

**Culture: The Explicit and the Implicit**

With the narratives of each school site at the beginning of Chapter 4, I intended to inform the reader of my first impressions about the schools. These observations served to give a foundation for each school site. In greater detail I explicitly divulge the levels of culture within MJS and ACS.

**MJS culture.** MJS teachers talked a great deal of their collaboration and the importance of sharing their practice; however, the teachers’ classroom doors remained closed throughout the day, with one teacher in charge of classroom teaching. Their hallways, though mentioned as meeting grounds, were not observed as such. Teachers within the school rushed from their classroom to their next responsibility, and it was apparent that the teacher participants felt most comfortable within their own classroom. One teacher participant’s practice was to be involved in a variety of classrooms helping with the literacy and numeracy instruction. She made a schedule of appointments and commented that she was frustrated by not having her own space.
The notion of space and domain prompted the discussion of the implicit levels of culture within MJS. Space was highly valued at MJS; the teachers were in the process of learning to share space yet their classrooms remained headed by one teacher with one desk. This led me to believe that their practices were not mutually shared; instead, practice was selectively shared. Teachers within MJS shared practice when they wanted, or when there was an offering from the consultant on an issue that they chose to work on. The selective form of shared practice revealed that MJS was emergent in their collaboration. The teachers discussed collaboration as an important part of their teaching, but as mentioned, it wasn’t observed. The shared language can result in collaboration becoming the norm.

Implicit within MJS was a culture of professionalism. The teachers presented themselves in professional attire on a daily basis. Of the teacher participants that were part of the focus group one had obtained a Master’s and two were embarking on their Master’s studies. Two teachers in the focus group were members of Special Subject Councils, one teacher had Special Education Certification, and one obtained English as an Additional Language Certification. The teacher participants carried themselves with a sense of pride in the teaching profession.

Implicit within the culture of MJS was the notion of Us versus Them. The teachers at MJS communicated that they were frustrated by the mandates and the perceived speed in which changes occurred at the school division. The swift change in leadership before the start of the school year reinforced this perception in the teacher participants.
ACS culture. The teacher participants at ACS shared that their physical structure was paramount to their ability to collaborate. For example, Liz stressed that professional learning took place for her because her classroom desk faced another colleague. Their future building was also set up to foster this type of atmosphere. The teachers noted that they were not proud of the level of decay in the school’s structure but they were committed to the shared practices that they began at this site and excited to continue those common practices at the new site.

ACS teachers wore casual attire, jeans were the norm, and some preferred to carry backpacks instead of attaché cases. The level of dress did not denote a lack of professionalism, rather it revealed that the teachers were ‘in the trenches’ working with the at-risk youth within their school. Their casual attire allowed them to connect with the demographic of the students within their school. The casual attire of the staff was also reflected in their casual relationships. ACS teacher participants’ valued a sense of humour. It was important for the teachers to be able to laugh with each other, and at themselves. Humour was an important survival tool because of the needs of the at-risk students that the teachers worked with. The sense of humour that the staff shared also allowed them to feel at ease with one another as they worked together throughout the day. Teacher participants felt secure in knowing that they did not need to know all of the answers, instead they could rely on the shared practices and the collective responsibility that all staff members shared.
Teacher participants at ACS exhibited all three underpinnings of parallel leadership: mutualism, shared purpose, and allowed individual expression (Crowther et al., 2009). ACS teachers felt trusted and supported by their leaders and shared that there was a team mentality that permeated through the participants. Trust and respect were the foundation of the school both within teacher relationships and within teacher-principal relationships. The teachers at ACS had a shared purpose through their innovations and instructional strategies. Participants felt empowered within the school to make decisions for their students as they collaboratively problem-solved. The teacher participants may have disagreed on best practices, as Liz mentioned in her individual interview, but they worked collectively toward a solution. The safe environment fostered at ACS allowed for collective problem-solving where the teachers expressed ideas and concerns as they collaboratively came to conclusions. This showed that the participants at ACS had the capacity to accommodate the needs of others.

Teacher participants at ACS shared that they worked very hard but thoroughly enjoyed the work that they did. Several teachers mentioned in their interviews that they had learned a great deal about teaching from being in the environment at ACS. This learning gene was embedded within the thick culture of ACS. The teachers adopted innovative practices and maintained a journey of inquiry as they navigated through those innovations. Eric had shared with me that the learning style at ACS was trial and error as they figured out what practices they could and could not do. Miranda shared that the consultant that had come to the school was there originally to help new and novice
teachers in their classrooms but as needs arose the consultant began to help in classrooms of veteran teachers. The learning gene was brought in through the consultant, as well as fostered in the collective belief of the staff. The teacher participants shared that they did not have solutions to all of their schools’ problems, but that answers would come through discussion and problem-solving among the staff.

**Implications**

In the section below, I present implications for theory in the analysis of engagement through the school culture lens. I reiterate some of my findings while sharing key learning points that could be of benefit to improving school culture and presenting implications for practice, implications for policy, implications for further research, and implications for methodology.

**Implications for Theory: Engagement and School Culture**

Engagement is being psychologically present through four dimensions: attentiveness, connectedness, integration and a focus on role performance (Kahn, 1992). Teachers in this study attributed engagement to support, either through peers, leadership, or funding. As Wolf et al. (2009) argued, engagement is a partnership between an organization and an individual. When teachers felt supported to engage, they freely and readily released themselves to participate. I understood through the participants comments that when teachers perceived more organizational support they were more likely to engage in an experience (Saks, 2006).
Engagement comes when equal and reciprocal engagement from all players exists within a professional development experience (Wolf et al., 2009). Teachers within both schools shared attributes of engagement (Christian et al., 2011); they were connected to their tasks, and they were focused on becoming more efficient through professional development experiences. The slight difference in engagement between the two schools was that ACS teacher participants were one step further on the continuum of engagement than the participants of MJS, ACS participants were familiar and comfortable in all parts of the school environment, and all took an active role in developing the organization as a whole. Equal engagement gave teachers a high motivation to learn, but this is a process that takes time and a safe environment in which to practice (Maloney & Konza, 2011).

MJS teacher participants did not believe that leadership was yet shared because of the change in leadership. This higher level of engagement in ACS also makes sense of the ‘Us versus Them’ mentality that was evident in MJS. Saks (2006) explained that engaged employees have higher quality relationships with their employers which results in positive attitudes.

As teacher participants built their own capacity, they were able to enable others to increase their capacity (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001). In the case of ACS, interpersonal capacity was not forced as top-down but the teachers felt ownership in making changes in their teaching styles and how they worked together. The teachers were given power to make decisions and create their innovative school structure with the clusters of students and teachers working in cohesion, which suggested that parallel leadership was present.
within the staff at ACS (Crowther et al., 2006). Through their consistent contact because of the physical layout of their desks facing one another, teachers were invited to share in discussions and problem-solving, which Mitchell and Sackney (2001) identified as building up a community of leaders. Teacher participants in ACS were deeply connected to one another stating that they learned more in this school than any other placement had taught them. These types of learning communities are rich for capacity building (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009). The structural and interpersonal transformations in the school were a result of the belief in the collective capacity (Schlechty, 2009). The teacher participants at ACS also identified that their changes were a work in progress and that there was need for time and for continued trouble-shooting. These practices are consistent with Doolittle et al.’s (2008) discussion that authentic capacity comes from time and continued problem-solving.

Thick cultures were present at both schools, and both schools were developing leaders, however, ACS teachers were given more time to collaborate as it was a central tenant of their school’s innovations. Mitchell and Sackney (2009) deemed development of teacher leaders and time for collaboration as supports for success. Because ACS had more time to collaborate, they shared a common language and their vision permeated through the teacher participants (Crowther et al., 2009).

**Revision of conceptual framework.** The conceptual framework that I created provided the scaffolding for this research. Through this research, my understanding of the interplay between professional development, collaboration, and engagement has been
augmented. These three notions, I contend, are highly dependent on one another. I argued in Chapter 2 that as one area is lacking or decreases, the other components would also decrease. I found this to be true for MJS participants; they viewed professional development more as a program to attend rather than a shared practice among the staff. The program mentality decreased the amount of collaboration time for teachers within this school; therefore their engagement was seen as personal, or in partnerships or small groups, not in the school as a whole.

To strengthen my conceptual framework in the future, I would make structure a component. Structure would be in the form of time given to teachers to collaborate, and more importantly the environment designed to allow teachers to collaborate. Teacher participants in ACS shared that it was because of their school’s physical structure that they were able to work together so frequently. The frequency that they were able to collaborate allowed the participants to develop almost continuously throughout their teaching day, which had positive effects on their level of engagement. As Uline and Tschannen-Moran (2007) explained, schools that are designed to allow teachers to be comfortable foster an environment where collective risks are taken to increase interaction and learning. Schools that have a physical structure that supports collective learning create an atmosphere of shared practices and increased organizational capacity. The teacher participants in ACS expressed that the physical structure of their school allowed them to be in consistent contact throughout the day. Teachers explained that the formal planned meeting times, the informal connections (before and after school or throughout
breaks in the day), and the location of their desks in relation to their colleagues contributed to the increased amount of interaction, which in turn led to shared language and practices.

**Implications for Practice**

As this research unfolded, it became apparent that, if the physical structure of the school promoted collaboration, teachers had higher instances of collaboration and dedication to their school’s aims. As Parnell, Cave, and Torrington (2008) argued, schools with environments that allow teachers to collaborate foster an environment where cultures are thick and sound pedagogy is central.

Richter, Kunter, Klussman, Lüdtke, and Baumert (2011) found that engaged teachers pursued more professional development. It is important then to ensure that teachers are engaged. Also discovered in that study, teachers that were toward the end of their career did not uptake nearly as much professional development as those in their career infancies. Richter et al. determined that perhaps it was due to the lack of potential promotion or instructional improvement. Teachers in this study mentioned the benefits of having on-site consultants to aid in their understanding of new teaching practices. A practical application then might be to increase veteran teachers’ release time to aid new teachers in their understanding of their teaching role. The conjunction of a novice teacher and a veteran teacher would have potential to increase both participants’ capacity. Leadership changes affect school culture (Seashore & Wahlstrom, 2011); however the teacher leadership within a school can stabilize a school culture (Taylor et al., 2011).
This research revealed that in this school division where principal changes are continuous, teacher leadership becomes a valuable resource for novice teachers. Teachers have the potential to play an important role in change and renewal in schools (McArdle & Coutts, 2010). In school divisions where leadership changes are evident, it is important to increase the use of and, more importantly, the equipping of teacher leaders in order to stabilize school goals, practices, and norms.

Teachers require time to meet in order to plan, design, and implement new teaching strategies (Jaipal & Figg, 2011). Meeting face-to-face is important for these teachers, either through scheduled meeting times or through informal times. In order to implement certain changes, teachers need time that is concentrated and separate from their current teaching duties. This research revealed that time is the greatest factor in teachers’ ability to engage in a professional development experience. Teachers suggested weekend development that was financially supported increased their likelihood of participation. It is important then that school divisions provide financially supported scheduled meeting times outside of the regular teaching day to allow for teachers to fully engage in professional development. Although this school division does provide monthly professional development days, in order to meet a wide variety of interests, stipends could be offered for those development sessions that occur outside of school hours.

Within schools, it is important to achieve a common language. Little (1982) commented that teacher observation helps to build that shared language. Increasing a shared language increases the effectiveness of informal conversations about formal
teaching practices. Parise and Spillane (2010) identified that informal learning has a positive impact on student learning. It would be my recommendation then that teachers in these schools increase the amount of observation in order to establish a thick culture through shared language. This school division identifies collaboration as an important pillar in the development of their teachers, and increasing the amount of teacher talk will increase the teachers’ level of comfort around collaboration.

**Implications for Policy**

Policy is a very powerful force in the education system. It is important that teachers are aware of and understand the role that policy plays in their teaching. Teachers in this study made mention of policies surrounding the resources for professional development. None, however, was aware of the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation policy (2006) or the school division *Guide to Effective Teaching Practice* (n.d.) that outlined that professional development was to be viewed as a collective practice that was enhanced through collegial support.

**Understanding policy.** Based on these findings, it is important for school divisions to communicate their policies to their teachers so that they fully understand and can embody and act out the directives of the policies. Those in power need to share with teachers why the policy is in place, and what it contains in order for teachers to adopt practices consistent with the policy documents (Timperley & Parr, 2009). When teachers fully understand policy they can more easily apply it to their practices. The administration may have shared the policy with their teachers but it was not stated in
either of the focus groups, nor did it come up in any of the interviews. Teachers are often presented a plethora of information in orientation programs without fully understanding all that is presented (Kardos et al., 2001). If this were the case, then the policy has not been explicitly taught. It would be worthwhile for the administration to explain the importance of the role of the Continuous Improvement Framework and the Learning Improvement Plan to their staff rather than simply tell them to ‘fill in their recording system’ to align with the school’s plan.

**Holonomy and teacher choice in professional development.** In a study involving Australian teachers, Hardy (2008) discovered that when teachers had to apply for and justify their professional development funding, engagement in professional development increased. When teachers have autonomy in selecting their areas of improvement, they are purposeful and active in their learning; this is an example of holonomy (Costa & Garmston, 1993). If teachers were to fully understand the policies of their school board, they may select areas of improvement that align with their school’s interpretation of the Learning Improvement Plan. Therefore, those drafting policies around teachers’ professional development need to allot financial resources in order to allow for selection of areas of interest. Teachers that are able to select their own areas of interest will increase the likelihood of teacher engagement. One teacher mentioned that she was interested in a book but the administration wanted to create a book circle to ensure that the book was put to good use. It may have been beneficial for each school to have a small
fund available for smaller professional development, such as buying pertinent literature, which has a personal interest for a teacher that impacts teacher practices.

**Implications for Further Research**

In my endeavour to understand the role that colleagues play in teachers’ engagement in professional development, a number of unconsidered factors cropped up along my research path. If anything, I find that I have more questions now than I did upon embarking on this study.

As has been mentioned, this school board has significant change over of leadership within its schools. It would be beneficial to link the understanding of culture to changes in leadership and the impact that those changes may have on the school culture. Seashore, Dretzke, and Wahlstrom (2010) discovered that leadership behaviour and characteristics may create the conditions for professional community to flourish among teachers. Principals do not have to necessarily model good teaching practices but should be able to provide instruction and learning for teachers on a regular, daily basis. Seashore and Wahlstrom (2011) argued that significant changes in leadership cause organizational learning to decrease, diminishing gains rapidly. Trust is paramount to school success, and when leadership is consistently changing, trust is difficult to establish. High turnover of principals has been shown to have a negative effect on school culture, because it has a negative effect on student achievement (Seashore, 2012). It would be interesting to embark on a longitudinal study of these schools as they encounter change in leadership throughout the years in school.
The small scope of this study (only two schools in one board, and small sample sizes in each school) poses another limitation; however, the purpose of this research was to understand the particulars, not to generalize the roles of colleagues in teachers’ engagement in professional development (Stake, 1978). In understanding the particulars that these participants presented, it will aid in enhancing engagement in professional development. A larger study of this school division may be of worth for future research in order to understand the overarching culture of the school division and its role and impact on individual schools within this division.

Another interesting phenomenon of these two schools is that they are located in two low socio-economic areas. ACS was providing a morning snack to all of its students and lunch to some of its students, while MJS was in discussion over the need to provide a morning snack in order for the students to function. Schools in poverty have recently been shown to create strong teacher leaders and promote team building among staff (Seashore, 2012). The schools in this study are in high poverty areas, and have a focus on collaboration and team building. McGuiness (2009) showed that poverty does not mean that a school has to be low achieving; so long as a school has a shared vision, believes in organizational learning, and is determined to overcome the odds of poverty, success is attainable. It would be interesting to conduct a collective case study on two schools from neighbourhoods of different socio-economic levels in order to further understand the role that colleagues play in teachers’ engagement in professional development.
An interesting area that emerged from the data is the differing needs of a novice teacher than that of a seasoned teacher. Throughout the interviews, novice teachers expressed an interest in workshops and conferences as well as on-site professional development, whereas seasoned teachers mentioned off-site being associated with the need for networking; veteran teachers expressed a greater interest in on-site professional development. Both novice and seasoned teachers indicated that on-going professional development should be the norm throughout one’s career in order to stay engaged in the teaching profession. Veteran teachers in these schools expressed a desire to continue learning even after retirement; this is contrary to the findings of Richter et al. (2011). They noted that teacher participation in professional development might decrease because the ‘payoffs’ become less enticing as they approach retirement. The potential for research would then be to understand the motivations of veteran teachers to engage in professional development and how these motivations might be different than those of novice teachers.

Through qualitative methods and the use of crystallization, I believe the findings of this research to be trustworthy and replicable. This research serves as another piece of scaffolding in the literature that builds a greater understanding about teachers’ engagement in professional development. I encourage further explorations of the topics uncovered in this study.

**Implications for Methodology**

When I began this research, I believed that, like Crowther et al. (2009), I would discover that the principal is not the central factor in teachers’ engagement. I believed
that colleagues were going to be the main reason that teachers fully engaged in professional development. I based this upon my own experiences and perceptions around school leadership. As I reviewed the literature, I was confronted with my own ignorance of all of the factors that motivate an individual to engage, such as the organizational structure, the policies that a school board has surrounding professional development, and the experiences offered for teachers. As I considered these varying factors, I noticed a commonality: all of the aforementioned factors could be found within a school culture. As culture piqued my interest, I began to understand that teachers work within a created culture. I noticed that culture was a ‘thing’ to be studied but that it was also active and played a role in teachers’ lives. As I reflected on my own experiences, I realized that culture was a hidden actor playing a role in my own teaching experience at this school board. This school board intrigued me even more because of their consistent change through the policy of transferring teachers and principals. I decided that a snap shot of school culture, the role of colleagues, and professional development needed to come under study. Thus the idea formed my research to understand how colleagues affect teachers’ engagement in professional development. The deliberate choice to omit the principal as a participant in this study was to highlight the collegial impacts on engagement.

I am aware that many novice researchers choose the case study approach because of its seemingly simple construction however I would now warn that this is not the case. I had to be very deliberate in my analysis to maintain focus on the bounded system that I
chose (Yin, 2003). I did not have a lot of guidance as to what a case study was, only that it is the process, the method of analysis, and the final product (Creswell, 2007). I found that it was difficult to navigate with very few step-by-step instructions to guide me. I found myself at times looking back on class notes to recall what it was that I was to be doing in a case study. It was times like these where I looked to the work of those who have walked this path before me in search for the next step.

Starting was challenging. Having to determine the case, I found it easier to determine what it was not as opposed to what it was. It was through the elimination of rabbit trails that I honed the research topic. I quickly eliminated the use of quantitative approach because of my lack of experience and short timeline. But after completing this study, I would advise novice researchers to attempt some part of quantitative analysis as it may help to eliminate some of the ‘clutter’ that qualitative studies produce. The clutter I am referring to is that of unnecessary data that are not pertinent to the findings. A simple survey using Likert-scale questions could have helped to strengthen the boundaries of the case and to keep clarity in the researcher’s mind.

Lastly, I would recommend talking about the research with as many people as possible (with the exception of the research participants). It was through discussions with individuals who had no prior knowledge of qualitative approaches or academia in general that helped me to distill what it was that I was setting out to accomplish. Through these discussions, I was forced to clearly define the boundaries of the case, and helped focus my own thoughts on the ‘thing’ that I was attempting to understand.
Conclusions

I discovered that professional development in the two schools under study is seen as valuable when it is relevant, accessible and personally interesting. Moreover, teachers in these schools engage in professional development to improve their craft, to network, and to work toward school improvement. Collaboration among teacher participants within these schools is high but the nature of it differs because of physical structure of the schools and the differences in leadership. Schools that are built to enhance teacher contact foster an environment where collaboration is commonplace. Teachers work hard to avoid isolation stating that it is a main cause in their disengagement not only from professional development but also from the profession itself. Finally, teachers are more likely to engage in professional development that aligns with their goals, personal or school based, they are more likely to engage when a safe environment is provided, and they are more likely to engage when they are able to genuinely contribute to a reciprocal conversation in learning.

The existing differences in these schools’ cultures were highlighted through narratives and a discussion on collaborative cultures. It was shown that in ACS, where collaboration was the norm and fostered through the environment, teacher participants felt it was necessary to develop within their school. Teacher participants in ACS also collaborated in an integrative fashion across large groups of people (Steiner, 2000). Teacher participants in MJS collaborated in a complementary fashion but did not have the larger scope of integrative collaboration that ACS participants had. This impacted
MJS participants’ professional development because it was still seen more as a personal act than a collective one. Professional development was shared in ACS participants in all cases because of the nature of the physical structures and the work that had been done to create a social environment that is focused on improvement.

Teachers’ responses in this research revealed many factors that contribute to their engagement in professional development experiences. Colleagues are a significant factor in teachers’ engagement in professional development when they are in an environment where collaboration is the norm. Teacher participants expressed that time and relationships with colleagues had the most significant impact on their teaching practices. It was in times of partnership and shared practices that teacher participants expressed satisfaction with development experiences. This study sought to understand the role that colleagues played in that engagement. Teacher participants desire face-to-face interaction; colleagues provide that interaction in a profession that can be somewhat isolating at times. Teacher participants also commented that they appreciated being part of the learning process and not given top-down directives to improve their teaching practices. Through collaborating, teacher participants were able to increase their own capacity and, subsequently, the school’s capacity. When teachers perceive heightened organizational support they are more likely to engage in professional development. As teachers begin to work together and achieve a sense of equal engagement from the other participants in a professional development experience, their own excitement for the task increases as well, allowing them to readily engage. An engaging environment is safe in
nature; as teachers are invited to share in discussion and problem-solving, a community of leadership is fostered. The shared practice of a community of leaders includes a thick culture that is based on sound pedagogy. To create a culture where engagement is the norm, I believe a few key needs must be addressed. The first need is concentrated amounts of time that is separate from teaching duties in order to allow teachers to collaborate to increase the likelihood of shared practices. The second need to increase shared practice is through authentic mentoring and teacher observation. Mentoring helps maintain engagement of veteran teachers and pass knowledge to novice teachers. Teacher observation can increase the shared language of instruction and establish a thick school culture. Third, and final, teachers must be financially supported in their professional development endeavours. These three points can potentially increase teachers’ engagement in professional development with their colleagues.
References


Appendix A

Examples of Focus Group and Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about your professional development experiences at this school. Mention any that are board, or principal mandated, any that are part of Professional Learning Communities, or any that you are doing on your own or with a partner.

2. Are there any professional development experiences or activities that weren’t mentioned already, that you participated in while teaching at a different school?

3. Why did you choose to participate in those professional development experiences?

4. How did you work with colleagues in those professional development experiences?

5. How do teachers, in general, work together in this school?

6. What are the benefits that you see of working together in professional development experiences?

7. What are some factors in whether you engage in a professional development experience?

8. What are school level or board policies that pertain to professional development that you are aware of?
   a. In your opinion, what impact do those policies have on your engagement in professional development?
Appendix B

Direct Observation Overview

Structures to observe:

- Staffroom or common room dialogue
- Bulletin boards in staff room/common room
- Books in staffroom/common room
- A Professional Learning Community in practice
- The halls during a teaching day
- School improvement aims
- Informal conversations with superintendent or principal to understand school board and school site professional development aims
Appendix C

Venn Diagram

Michaele Jean School (MJS)
1 teacher with Master's,
2 emerging on Master's
No lunch provided
Population: 270 kids
1st year female principal
Literacy/Numeracy lead teachers
Structurally sound school
Double grade classrooms
with a partner to work with
(except the grade 8
classroom teacher)
Of the participants,
5 seasoned, 3 novice teachers
Emerging at innovations
put forth by the board

Adrienne Clarkson School (ACS)
2 teachers with Master's,
2 working on Master's,
1 emerging on Master's
Universal snack provided,
lunch provided to some students
Population: 360 kids
Seasoned male principal,
3rd year at this school
Old building, structurally unsound,
new building in the near future
3 grade cluster classrooms with
4 teachers per cluster
Of the participants,
3 seasoned, 5 novice,
and 1 new teacher
In third year of
practicing grassroots innovations

Both MJS and ACS
Large population of English
as an Additional Language
(EAL) students
Wide range of socio-economic status (SES) with
majority in the lower SES
range
Very few males on staff
Consultant present but not
situated at the school
Schools separate junior and
senior elementary classrooms
Multi-grade classrooms
Little movement of teaching
staff from prior school year
Sense of humour is important

In order to ensure the confidentiality is protected to the extent possible, some information
had to be left out of the Venn diagram.
Appendix D

Ethics Review

August 02, 2011

Ms. Karalyn J. Schmalz, Master’s Student
Faculty of Education
Duncan McArthur Hall
Queen’s University
511 Union Street
Kingston, ON K7M 5R7

GREB Ref #: GEDUC-560-11, Romeo#6006010
Title: ‘GEDUC-560-11 A Collective Case Study: Understanding the Link between Colleagues and Professional Development Engagement’

Dear Ms. Schmalz,

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled ‘GEDUC-560-11 A Collective Case Study: Understanding the Link between Colleagues and Professional Development Engagement’ for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS) and Queen’s ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (article D.1.6) and Senate Terms of Reference (article G), your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB; of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (access this form at https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Adverse Event Report). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementations of new procedures. To make an amendment, access the application at https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Amendment to Approved Study Form. These changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services or irvingg@queensu.ca for further review and clearance by the GREB or GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Joan Stevenson, PhD
Professor and Chair
General Research Ethics Board

cc: Dr. Ben Kutsyrumra, Faculty Supervisor
    Dr. Lesly Wade-Woolley, Chair, Unit REB
    E-REB: c/o Graduate Studies and Bureau of Research, Attn.: Celina Caswell
Appendix E

Samples of Recruitment Letters

Sample Recruitment Letter to Superintendent:

Dear Superintendent;

We have previously been in contact about the possibility of me conducting research with teachers from Regina Public Schools. It is my hope to conduct focus groups in two of your elementary schools. I would require two schools in comparable size. One school will have a reputation of being highly collaborative in nature, and the other school to be working toward a collaborative culture.

Collaborative schools will look like caring and respectful schools; they will be goal oriented and have a strong vision for school improvement and have plans toward those improvements. They will be characterized by a strong belief in the collective staff.

Schools working toward becoming more collaborative may look like “closed doors” to the outside but staff are coming together when time is allotted for them to do so (at staff meetings, professional development days, etc). They may engage in some collaborative work, but the work is at a “back-scratching” stage for school improvement instead of a vision for overall improvement.

I have attached the file that I submitted to Queen’s Research Ethics Board. This form outlines the ethical considerations that are required from Queen’s in order to gain ethical clearance for the advancement of my study, A collective case study: Understanding the role of colleagues in teachers’ engagement in professional development.

I would also like to discuss with you any board or school policy documents that may be helpful in my case study research. Any additional information or documents that you think would aid in my understanding would be helpful.
Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, concerns or ethical considerations that you would like to bring to my attention. I look forward to working with you and your teachers.

Thank you again for your cooperation,

Karalyn Schmalz

Encl. <GREB application form>
Sample Recruitment Email to principals of schools:

Dear <principal>;

I am a Master’s student from Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario. I am conducting research for my thesis. I have been in discussion with Superintendent Susan (pseudonym) about possible school sites for conducting my thesis research. She has suggested that I set up a meeting to discuss with you about the possibility of having your teachers as research participants in my study, *A collective case study: Understanding the role of colleagues in teachers’ engagement in professional development*.

For my research, I am hoping to conduct a focus group interview with six to eight of the teachers that work in your school. It is my hope to be able to conduct this focus group in the school, since the teachers have already gathered there and it is a common ground. It is my intention to use 60-75 minutes of the teachers’ time to conduct this focus group interview, possibly after school. I will be conducting follow up one-on-one interviews with teachers that volunteer an additional hour of time, which will also not interfere with school time.

I would also require your permission to observe the school’s physical and social structures, for example, I would like to observe the staff room, or sit in on a professional learning community meeting, if possible.

I would appreciate meeting with you and discussing the possibility of conducting research with the teachers in your school.

Sincerely,

Karalyn Schmalz
Master’s of Education Student
Queen’s University
Sample Recruitment Letter to teachers for participation:

Dear Teacher;

I am a Queen’s University Master’s student and I am very excited that you have expressed an interest in being a participant in this research. For the research I will first conduct a focus group interview. This focus group interview will take a maximum of 75 minutes. It will be done at the school on a date that works for all participants, and either lunch or snacks will be provided depending on the day and time that works best.

In this focus group I will ask you to discuss your professional development experiences, and your experiences with colleagues in professional development.

If you choose, I will also be seeking 2-4 teachers to participate in a follow up 1-hour one-on-one interview. More information will be given to those that express an interest in participating in one-on-one interviews.

I will be coming by the school soon to hand out a letter of information to those that express an interest to volunteer for the focus group that clearly lays out the terms of the research. I will also be available to answer questions you may have in regards to your potential participation in the research.

Thank you for your consideration,

Karalyn Schmalz
Sample One-on-one Letter:

Dear Teacher;

Thank you for expressing an interest to participate in a follow-up one-on-one interview for this research.

I will be in contact with you to determine a date, time and place that works to facilitate this interview. It is my opinion that conducting the interview at the school after school hours would be best since it would present fewer interruptions and help to keep the context of the school in mind throughout the interview.

The interview will take 60 minutes to complete and will allow you to expound on the information that you provided in the focus group as well as any other insights that you have gained since the focus group.

If you have any questions, or suggestions for the best time to contact you, please don’t hesitate to contact me 9kjs3@queensu.ca.

Sincerely,

Karalyn Schmalz
Appendix F

Letter of Information and Consent Form for Focus Group

DATE: August, 2011

LETTER OF INFORMATION / CONSENT FORM

Focus Group Interview

A Collective case study: Understanding the role of colleagues in teachers’ engagement in professional development

Principal Investigator: Karalyn Schmalz
    Master’s Student
    Faculty of Education
    Queen’s University
    Kingston, ON, Canada
    (613) 929-5478
    E-mail: 9kjs3@queensu.ca

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Ben Kutsyuruba
    Assistant Professor
    Faculty Supervisor
    Queen’s University
    Kingston, ON, Canada
    (613) 533-3049
    ben.kutsyuruba@queensu.ca

Purpose of the Study:
You are invited to take part in this study about the role of colleagues in teachers’ engagement in professional development (PD). I am doing this research for my thesis and I am hoping to learn about your experiences in PD and how your colleagues played a role in those experiences.

This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines, and Queen's policies.
Procedures involved in this research:
For part of this study you will be asked to take part in a focus group interview that will take 60–75 minutes. The focus group will occur on <date> from <time – time> at your school. My research will also include an individual interview, to be conducted at a later date, that you may be interested in. This letter outlines the focus group interview.

Focus group interview:
For this study I am asking you to participate in a focus group interview. With your permission, it will be audio-recorded. I will facilitate the focus group and it will be 60-75 minutes in length. I will ask open-ended questions such as: How do you work with colleagues in PD experiences? And, what are the benefits to PD? This interview will be audio-recorded and will have a note-taker present.

Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts:
I do not foresee any harms or discomforts associated with this study.

Are there any benefits to doing this study?
While the research will not benefit you directly, I hope that what is learned as a result of this study will help me to better understand role of colleagues in PD experiences.

Payment or Reimbursement :
You will not be reimbursed for participating in the study.

Confidentiality
You are participating in this study confidentially. I will not use your name or any information that would allow you to be identified, unless you indicate otherwise. Myself, the note-taker, and teachers participating in the focus group interview will know that you have participated.

We will use pseudonyms to safeguard the confidentiality of the focus group discussion. We ask the other members of the focus group to keep what you say confidential, but we cannot guarantee
that they will do so. The note-taker will sign a confidentiality form to ensure your confidentiality and privacy.

Also, every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality and privacy to the extent possible. I will not use your name or any information that would allow you to be identified. It is quite possible, however, that through the stories you tell, your identity may be revealed. If any reference is made that may reveal your identity in the focus group I will do my best to make you aware of that and give you the option of removing it from the data.

In accordance with Queen’s policies, the information you provide will be kept in a locked filing cabinet where only I will have access to it. Information kept on my computer will be password-protected. Once the study has been completed, the data will be destroyed after the five year allotted time has passed.

The data may also be published in professional journals or presented at scientific conferences, but any such presentations will be of general findings and will never breach individual confidentiality. Should you be interested, you are entitled to a copy of the findings.

**Participation and Withdrawal**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or that make you feel uncomfortable. You also have the option of withdrawing from the study at any time. Should you choose to withdraw, you may request that all or part of your data be destroyed. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. Your decision whether or not to be part of the study will not affect your status at Regina Public Schools.

**Information about the Study Results**

I expect to have this study completed by April, 2012. If you would like a brief summary of the results, please provide your email or mailing address below.
This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines, and Queen's policies.

Questions about the Study
Any questions about study participation may be directed to Karalyn Schmalz at 9kjs3@queensu.ca, or to my supervisor, Ben Kutsyuruba at ben.kutsyuruba@queensu.ca or 613-533-3049. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at chair.GREB@queensu.ca or 613-533-6081.

CONSENT

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Karalyn Schmalz, of Queen’s University.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time, and may remove any or all of my data.
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- I understand that the purpose of this study is to understand the role of colleagues in teachers’ engagement in professional development.
- I understand that this focus group will take between 60 – 75 minutes of my time.
- I understand that this focus group will be audio recorded.
- I understand that the researcher will maintain my confidentiality to the extent possible.
- I understand that I must keep the focus group discussion confidential.
- I would like to receive a summary of the study’s results.
  ___ Yes, please send them to this email or postal address: _____________________________.
  ___ No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study’s results.

Name of Participant (Printed) ____________________________
Signature: ____________________________
Date: ____________________________

Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return to Karalyn Schmalz. Retain the second copy for your records.
Appendix G
Letter of Information and Consent Form for Individual Interviews

DATE: August, 2011

LETTER OF INFORMATION / CONSENT FORM
Individual Interview

A Collective case study: Understanding the role of colleagues in teachers’ engagement in professional development

**Principal Investigator:** Karalyn Schmalz  
**Faculty Supervisor:** Dr. Ben Kutsyuruba  
Master’s Student  
Faculty of Education  
Queen’s University  
Kingston, ON, Canada  
(613) 929-5478  
E-mail: 9kjs3@queensu.ca

Associate Professor  
Faculty Supervisor  
Queen’s University  
Kingston, ON, Canada  
(613) 533-3049  
ben.kutsyuruba@queensu.ca

**Purpose of the Study:**
You are invited to take part in this study about the role of colleagues in teachers’ engagement in professional development (PD). I am doing this research for my thesis and I am hoping to learn about your experiences in PD and how your colleagues played a role in those experiences.

This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines, and Queen's policies.

**Individual interview:**
For part of this study I am asking you to participate in an individual interview. With your permission, it will be audio-recorded. I will facilitate the interview and it will be 60 minutes in length.

You will be asked similar questions as those used in the focus group but you will have the benefit of time to expound on your responses. Some sample questions are: why do you participate in professional development? And, how did you work with colleagues during those professional development experiences?

**Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts:**
I do not foresee any harms or discomforts associated with this study.

**Are there any benefits to doing this study?**
While the research will not benefit you directly, I hope that what is learned as a result of this study will help me to better understand role of colleagues in PD experiences.

**Payment or Reimbursement**
You will not be reimbursed for participating in the study.

**Confidentiality**
You are participating in this study confidentially. I will not use your name or any information that would allow you to be identified, unless you indicate otherwise. Only I will know that you have participated in this interview.

I will use pseudonyms to safeguard the confidentiality of the interview.

Also, every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality and privacy to the extent possible. I will not use your name or any information that would allow you to be identified. However, we are often identifiable through the stories we tell. If any reference is made that may reveal your identity in the interview I will do my best to make you aware of that and give you the option of removing it from the data.
In accordance with Queen’s policies, the information you provide will be kept in a locked filing cabinet where only I will have access to it. Information kept on my computer will be password-protected. Once the study has been completed, the data will be destroyed after the five year allotted time has passed.

The data may also be published in professional journals or presented at scientific conferences, but any such presentations will be of general findings and will never breach individual confidentiality. Should you be interested, you are entitled to a copy of the findings.

**Participation and Withdrawal**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or that make you feel uncomfortable. You also have the option of withdrawing from the study at any time. Should you choose to withdraw, you may request that all or part of your data be destroyed. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. Your decision whether or not to be part of the study will not affect your status at Regina Public Schools.

**Information about the Study Results**

I expect to have this study completed by April, 2012. If you would like a brief summary of the results, please provide your email or mailing address below.

*This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines, and Queen's policies.*

**Questions about the Study**

Any questions about study participation may be directed to Karalyn Schmalz at 9kjs3@queensu.ca, or to my supervisor, Ben Kutsyuruba at ben.kutsyuruba@queensu.ca or 613-533-3049. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at chair.GREB@queensu.ca or 613-533-6081.
CONSENT

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Karalyn Schmalz, of Queen’s University.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time, and may remove any or all of my data.
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- I understand that the purpose of this study is to understand the role of colleagues in teachers’ engagement in professional development.
- I understand that this interview will take 60 minutes of my time.
- I understand that this interview will be audio recorded.
- I understand that the researcher will maintain my confidentiality to the extent possible.
- I would like to receive a summary of the study’s results.
  ___ Yes, please send them to this email or postal address: ________________________________________________________
  ___ No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study’s results.

Name of Participant (Printed) ________________________________________________
Signature: __________________________
Date: _______________________

Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return to Karalyn Schmalz. Retain the second copy for your records.