

A CASE OF INFORMAL TEACHER LEARNING IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore how teacher learning happened informally at the workplace. Another aim was to describe the ways in which informal learning contributes to teacher development. The study also endeavoured to establish if the school supported or hindered informal learning.

The method of case study was used to understand how both novice and experienced teachers learn informally in a secondary school. The study examined five teachers' informal learning experiences in the school by drawing on accounts of the individual teachers' perceptions and reflections documented in journals, photographs and interviews. The journal entries were used to write narratives which outlined how teachers learnt informally in the workplace. Teachers were asked to take photographs of the places in which they learnt informally. The interviews awarded teachers the opportunity to talk about the photographs they chose to capture.

The study found that teachers engage in various forms of informal learning opportunities at school. These opportunities were both planned and unplanned. The research indicated that informal learning is situated. Some of the learning opportunities included being part of a learning community, learning by interacting with colleagues in informal chats and attending meetings. In these instances it was found that teachers learnt with and from others, which is socially. This illustrates collaborative learning in the school. Teachers also engaged in individual learning. It was discovered that the school must provide opportunities for teachers to engage in informal learning.

The study considered the various opportunities that existed in the school for teachers to develop and found that such opportunities contributed towards extending teacher knowledge and development. The study found that teachers in the study were willing to take the initiative to seek the learning they thought they required.

The study recommends that informal learning be recognised as an authentic form of teacher learning and development in schools. Further, schools must become sites of learning for teachers by creating, encouraging and sustaining learning opportunities.

Key words: informal learning, collaborative learning, planned and unplanned learning, social, individual, situated.

DECLARATION

I, Sharmaine Prammoney, declare that

- (i) The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work.**
- (ii) This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.**
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Signed.....

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CHAPTER 1

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

Research has time and again suggested that the professional development of teachers is essential to improving learner performance in schools. However, the road to professional development for a job with a practical bias is complex. It is not easily encapsulated in a universal package that caters for all teachers who have to perform their jobs in differing contexts that can either encourage or impede teacher development. This chapter will outline the rationale of this study. It will also highlight the purpose of this study as well as provide a structure of the thesis.

1.2. RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Researchers have called for more focus on how teachers learn. While there is agreement among researchers that teachers learn by engaging in both formal and informal learning programmes, there are fewer advocacies for teachers learning informally. Contemporary research has begun to illuminate the effectiveness of teachers learning on site by engaging in their jobs. Studies by Knight (2002); Kwakman (2003) and Mawhinney (2010) strongly contend that on site learning contributes to a large degree towards the development of teacher competencies and knowledge.

Many research studies indicate that novice teachers enter schools with a gap in their knowledge which hinders their functioning as efficient and effective teachers. We realise from this that formal teacher training cannot possibly equip training teachers with everything they need to know. This gap seemed to be filled by these teachers engaging in informal learning at their schools often by learning in communities, interacting informally with other teachers or even by trial and error. Even experienced teachers constantly find that they are extending their knowledge by similar means. Thus teachers' learning informally is ongoing, social and or individual and supported by the teachers they interact with.

It is on this basis that researchers call for a stronger support in acknowledging the merits of informal teacher learning.

1.3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

While informal teacher learning is fast emerging as an accredited form of teacher learning abroad, there is little research in South Africa to suggest the same trend locally. Since research highlights the merits of informal teacher learning, this research focuses on South African teachers incorporating such learning as part of their professional development. I believe that while both forms of learning are important, more cognisance must be taken of the value informal learning has on teachers' professional development.

I hope that this investigation provides some groundwork for stakeholders in teacher professional development in South Africa. This study should provide insight into how professional development programmes should be modified in order to bring effective opportunities for teachers to learn and how Continuing Professional Development programmes could support informal learning.

In answering the research questions: How do teachers learn informally? To what extent does informal learning contribute to teachers learning and professional development? What factors support or hinder informal learning at school? I used the following data collection methods: journal entries, photographs and photo voice interviews. An analysis of the journals and transcripts of the interviews revealed themes that emerged from the study which helped to understand how teachers in the study engaged in informal learning in their school.

1.4. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Chapter 1: Presents the framework for the research and highlights the need for research in this field. It also provides the purpose and rationale for the study.

Chapter 2: A synthesis of the literature of studies conducted mostly abroad. The literature offers a dimension of teacher learning that was often taken for granted. Many studies indicate that teacher learning should be viewed with a new lens, placing the crux of what and how teachers learn in their working context. I found a very limited source of

information regarding teacher learning in South African schools. The few readings available were analysed and it is hoped that this study would extend the knowledge currently available regarding teacher learning in South Africa.

Chapter 3: Here I have made explicit some of the key concepts that I have used in this study. Some of the concepts include: lifelong learning, self directed learning, situated learning, collaboration, social and individual learning.

This study acknowledges that teachers can learn from both formal and informal learning programmes. This chapter deals with the concepts that surround teachers engaging in informal learning programmes. Teachers engage in both social and individual learning.

Chapter 4: The participants' narratives are presented outlining how each engages with informal learning. Their narratives are developed from the analysis of their journals and transcripts of the photo voice interviews. At the end of each narrative the participants learning is plotted on a matrix that was adapted from Reid's quadrants of learning to illustrate their own informal learning (McKinney et al. 2005 cited in Fraser et al. 2007). This is followed by a brief summary of the participants learning.

Chapter 5: An analysis of the findings of this study. Similarities and differences across the narratives were compared to reveal how teachers engaged in informal learning and to what extent this learning contributed to their professional development. The results also indicated which factors supported the school as a site of informal learning and those that hindered informal learning at the school.

1.5. LIMITATIONS

One of the limitations of the study is that the results are not generalisable as the study is confined firstly to, only a group of teachers in a school and secondly, to a single school. Another limitation is that I am an educator and researcher at the school chosen as the site of investigation. It is possible that my status as researcher and educator could have compromised or influenced how the teachers responded.

This study endeavours to investigate how informal learning occurs in a secondary school. It will also highlight to what extent informal learning contributes to teachers learning and

professional development. Finally, it makes clear some of the factors that support and hinder informal teacher learning at the school.

1.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided guidance to the rationale and purpose of the study. It has also outlined the structure of the study. Further, I have pointed out some of the limitations of this study. In the ensuing chapter I will present a review of the literature around the research topic.

CHAPTER 2

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will focus on defining the key concepts surrounding teacher learning and teacher development. I will explore the ways in which these concepts are understood as being similar and as being different. The literature available indicates that internationally there is a great awareness of informal teacher learning. However, local studies with such a focus are few, emphasising a gap in the research that this study aims to fill. This study will explore how teachers learn informally in one South African high school. I will begin this chapter by exploring the concepts of teacher learning and continuing professional development. Then I will differentiate between formal learning and informal learning. Thereafter I will illustrate how more awareness of the merits of informal learning is emerging.

I will first focus on the international literature on these concepts, and will then engage with the South African literature. Other key concepts that will be reviewed are: procedural and propositional knowledge; situated learning; learning communities and collaboration.

2.2. TEACHER LEARNING

Teachers learn in different ways and via different processes and forms. These include engaging in formal and informal learning opportunities. There is a distinction between formal and informal learning but both forms of learning are relevant to teachers' learning. Wilson and Berne (1999) make this distinction clear when they refer to teacher learning as a "patchwork of opportunities" referring to both formal and informal opportunities as well as "serendipitous" which this study refers to as unplanned (incidental) opportunities. The "patchwork" also includes planned opportunities. A strong argument is also presented by Knight (2002) that "delivery models" in the form of courses, workshops etc. does not provide sufficient learning "fit for all the purposes to which it is applied." Thus he strongly advocates that informal learning be recognized as a meritorious form of teacher learning. Formal learning is embedded mostly in planned forms of learning usually directed by

experts and is didactic in nature. However, in schools planned forms of learning like subject committee meetings, often provide a platform for unplanned (incidental) learning as teachers work together collaboratively. In contrast to formal learning, informal learning exists in a more casual way with the teachers largely responsible for identifying what they need to learn, where they learn and how they learn. Learning informally is more spontaneous and incidental and notably self-directed. It offers teachers the opportunity to learn and develop in areas that they specifically lack in order to make their learning “tailor made”.

It is evident in research that much of what teachers learn and how they learn emanates from their interaction with their working environment. This is evident in the definition of situated learning adopted by Anderson *et al.* (1996, p. 5) “situated learning emphasizes the idea that much of what is learned is specific to the situation in which it is learnt.” He highlights the emphasis on “real world” situations namely, the classroom which impacts on what and how teachers learn. Experiential and workplace learning are linked in that encounters during the execution of one’s job contribute to one’s learning. Incidental learning in an occupation like teaching is unavoidable as each lesson and certainly each day offers new insights for the teacher. Part of a teacher’s engagement with her context includes collaboration on different levels with different individuals. This engagement with the context impacts on what and how teachers learn.

Researchers appear to have different understandings of what teacher learning is. Their differing understandings of the concept of teacher learning highlight the diverse ways in which it is possible for teachers to learn. Teacher learning can include “a new understanding or capacity being developed” (Schoenfield 1999, cited in Hagger *et al.*, 2008, p.6.) or using “existing knowledge in a new context or in new combinations” (Eraut, 2000, cited in Hagger *et al.* 2008, p.114). Another view presented by Elmore *et al.* (1996, cited in Wilson and Berne, 1999) focuses on the incorporation of “the curriculum and the pedagogy of professional development.” These understandings pay attention to different components of what and how teachers learn. The varying definitions indicate that teacher learning can be perceived differently therefore there is a need for teachers to have a wide access to learning opportunities so that they learn what is relevant to their development.

These different conceptions emphasise that teacher learning is difficult to define and measure. In fact Kelly (2006) aptly describes it as a process that steers teachers “towards expertise” suggesting that it is something teachers are constantly involved in. Learning is part of an ongoing process. In order for teachers to perform at their optimum they need to take cognisance of how they execute their jobs both in and out of the classroom. This is corroborated by Erickson *et al.* (2005, p. 795) who point out that much of teachers’ learning comes from their own analysis of isolated experiences in their own classrooms, making their practice more purposeful and professional. This suggests that teachers are required to analyse what they do in their classrooms. Similarly, in the study conducted by Hager *et al.* (2008) they found that experience was crucial in constructing professional knowledge.

Being aware of ones’ practice is instrumental in identifying what one needs to learn. While teacher learning still remains an elusive concept to define for researchers, it is evident that teacher growth in the profession hinges on teacher learning. In this study I will deem the initiatives teachers embark on to increase their knowledge of any kind as teacher learning. I will pay particular attention to those initiatives that involve teachers learning informally.

In an attempt to understand how and where teachers learn, Fraser *et al.* (2007) extended their conception of teacher learning to accommodate and promote experiential learning, collegial support and collaborative and interactional techniques. They therefore suggest that teachers learn on the job. Research indicates that teacher learning is more than the transmission of knowledge from an expert. It also involves re- establishing and re- negotiating ones self to fulfill new roles demanded of teachers. This in turn requires teachers to take cognisance of their teaching skills and techniques and identify what they need to learn in order to fulfill their necessary roles as teachers.

Experience enables teachers to extend their “knowledge, skills and understandings” (Hagger *et al.* 2008, p.160). Part of this experience includes interacting with other teachers thus teacher learning occurs from teachers’ collaborative actions, (Lave and Wenger, 1991, cited in Wilson and Demetriou, 2007). The UK has found experience or practical learning to be an ideal way to train teachers, (Wilson and Demetriou, 2007) and such practice teaches teachers to be life long learners (Hagger *et al.*, 2008) which they claim is necessary for teachers to be competent in their classrooms.

A succinct definition of teacher learning as a process, whereby teachers develop skills and acquire expertise by being involved in a process of action and reflection, is offered by (Billert, 2001 cited in Wilson and Demetriou, 2007). Teachers therefore are involved in their learning and have opportunities to extend their development beyond the confines of their individual classrooms and schools. This means that teachers grow in their profession by engaging with their daily practice. The researchers cited above indicate that teacher learning occurs by an active engagement with their jobs in the classroom and their working environment. They make it clear that teacher learning extends beyond acquiring knowledge and includes acquiring skills and reflective competences. It is therefore anticipated that teacher learning is a result of teachers participating in the practice of teaching and consequently becoming knowledgeable about their practice.

As a result of this ongoing interaction and engagement, professional development has seen a shift in emphasis from “teaching to teacher learning” (Sparks 2002; Stoll, Earl and Fink 2003 cited in Collinson *et al.*, 2009). Teachers and their engagement with their contexts have become relevant in the jobs they do. Research studies confirm that experiential learning, workplace learning, incidental learning and collaborative learning are forming a larger part of teacher development and growth. Thus, successful teacher learning hinges on teachers engaging in continuing professional development.

2.3. CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The need to develop and sustain teacher growth is met by continuing professional development (CPD). CPD entails teachers becoming better at what they do by seeking development in areas they identify as lacking. Researchers perceive CPD in different ways. Some claim it is “an ongoing process of reflection and review” with the aim of addressing needs (Meddlewood *et al.*, 2005 cited in Fraser *et al.*, 2007, p.156). This definition implies that teachers are evaluating their teaching and are therefore conscious of their practice. As needs vary it is also likely that teachers require content knowledge as pointed out by Desimone (2002, p.81) who defines CPD as teachers “increasing their content knowledge and develop their teaching practices.” An alternate view is highlighted by Miller and Silvernail (1994 cited in Evans 2002, p.126) who perceive professional development as “teachers seeking and communicating the rationale underpinning their practice.” This

suggests that teachers are aware of their practice and are involved in keeping up with the changes that frequently happen. However, this may not necessarily always be the case. The different conceptions of teacher learning show no distinct difference between teacher learning and CPD suggesting that teacher learning is deeply embedded in CPD as opportunities to learn.

Day and Sachs (2004, p.3) claim that CPD is about “good qualifications, being highly motivated, knowledgeable and skilful” and includes all forms of learning. I find this a more holistic way of defining CPD as it is evident that teachers need more knowledge than what books can offer. Research shows that a teacher’s worth depends on more than her content knowledge. A teacher only truly learns how to be a teacher the day she starts teaching. Further, her learning to be a teacher lies in the context of her classroom, school and will invariably extend to other schools and teachers. There is no doubt that CPD can be perceived differently but ultimately is aimed at addressing teachers learning to be more effective, competent and confident so that that they can perform adequately in their profession.

Kelly (2006) highlights the complexities that exist around what constitutes CPD. It is evident that researchers agree that teachers’ learning entail increasing content knowledge and good qualifications and perhaps reflecting and reviewing, but how do teachers access what they need to learn? According to Kelly (2006) CPD is made up of “planned opportunities for teacher learning.” However, this is hotly contested by researchers like Day and Sachs (2004), Kwakman (2003), Shulman and Shulman (2004) and Lieberman and Mace (2008) who argue that CPD is also made up of unplanned opportunities to learn.

Thus, not unlike teacher learning, the complexity of CPD is highlighted by the lack of a common definition by researchers. Researchers do however agree that CPD is concerned with acquiring or expanding knowledge and that participation in CPD makes teachers more aware about their practice. Fraser *et al.* (2007) acknowledges the process of professional development as ongoing and a means to personal growth. Evans (2002) found that researchers refrain from clearly defining teacher development. She adopts the definition by Day and Sachs (1999 cited in Evans 2002, p.128)

Teacher development is the process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purposes of teaching; and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues through each phase of their teaching lives.

This definition encompasses the notion that learning is an interactive process within a social environment. Further, it embodies the dynamic nature of the system of education where teachers are constantly assuming new roles and identities. The work environment provides the background for a large amount of teachers' learning and developing in their role functions.

Mestry *et al.* (2009, p.477) in agreement with Day (1999) and Dean (1991) also highlight the active involvement of teachers in their development of their roles as "change agents to the moral purposes of teaching." Thus, they too believe that teachers' development is more than just the acquisition and development of skills, attitudes and knowledge. It is becoming increasingly evident in research that CPD entails teachers reflecting on their own practice, taking action to develop in areas that they believe they need to and working collaboratively rather than in isolation. This illustrates that teacher learning is an ongoing process and that it is dependent on teachers' reflective practice.

Teacher learning is almost synonymous with teacher development. What teachers learn, how they learn, where they learn and with whom they learn are important aspects of an education system because teachers' involvement in professional development impacts on the expertise of the teachers which in turn impacts on how teachers execute their jobs. Teacher learning then is seemingly integral to teacher development. CPD is a process of development underpinned by teacher learning.

For the purpose of this study I will use Day and Sachs' (2004) definition of professional development. Essentially their definition recognises that teacher learning includes all forms of learning. Further, they also agree that teachers develop both "alone and with others" and that teachers can take cognisance of their practice. "Teachers review, renew and extend their commitment" implies that teacher reflection is a necessary requirement for self

development (Day and Sachs, 1999 cited in Evans 2002, p.128). This definition encompasses a broader spectrum of teachers and their practice and acknowledges that learning can take place both formally and informally.

According to researchers, contemporary forms of CPD have resulted in a sense of self awareness in teachers (Kelly, 2006; Hager, 2001). As a result, teachers' needs; their sense of ownership for their development; and learning in context is proving to be meritorious in teacher development research. Such development can take place in both formal and informal ways. Bell and Dale (1999) advocate that formal learning works in synergy with informal learning equating the relationship between the two types of learning to that of a brick and mortar with formal learning being the bricks and informal learning the mortar which facilitates formal learning. Day and Sachs (2004, p.3) claim that CPD includes all activities that teachers engage in to enhance their work however these activities can be categorised into formal and informal learning opportunities as suggested by Reid, (McKinney et al. 2005 cited in Fraser *et al.* 2007).

Reid's quadrants of teacher learning (McKinney et al. 2005 cited in Fraser *et al.* 2007) also illustrate a further dimension of planned-incidental opportunities of learning. The quadrants are formed by placing formal-informal learning on one axis and planned-incidental learning on the other, where planned learning opportunities can be both formal and informal and incidental learning opportunities are "spontaneous and unpredictable" (*ibid*).

Clark (2007, p.4) offers a similar view claiming that both formal and informal learning are part of a continuum and includes intentional (planned) and incidental (unplanned) learning opportunities. Thus professional learning opportunities for teachers exist across a vast range, and recent research indicates that there is a trend of teachers engaging in informal learning to a greater extent than they are in formal programmes of learning. Cofer (2000 cited in Clark 2007, p.4) found in a study that "each hour of formal learning spills over to four hours of informal learning or a 4:1 ratio."

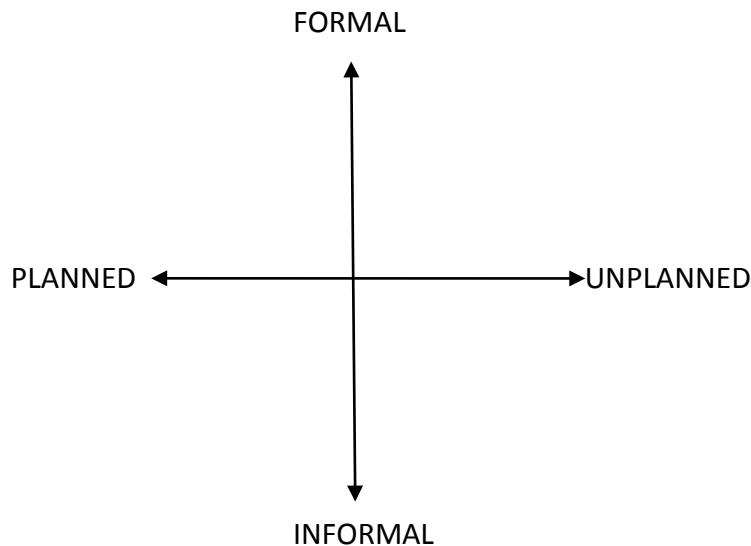


Figure 1: REID'S QUADRANTS OF TEACHER LEARNING

(in Mckinney, 2005 cited in Fraser, 2007)

2.4. FORMAL LEARNING

Formal learning is an organised, structured way of learning. One progresses through formal learning in a sequenced manner “based on direct instruction” and requires “students to master predetermined outcomes” (Burns *et al.*, 2005, p.2). Formal learning includes learning at courses, workshops, university etc. This way of learning is referred to as the “event delivery model”. These events are organised and conducted by experts over a specified period of time.

Such learning is important and necessary in teacher learning especially in the formative years of training, however, researchers have found that it is not sufficient on its own to provide holistic and effective development for teachers (Knight, 2002). One of the problems associated with formal learning, especially relating to event deliveries in the form of workshops or courses, is that “there could be a mismatch between provision and needs” for teachers, resulting in inadequate, insufficient or inappropriate training (Knight, 2002, p. 230). Another rather huge problem that plagues formal learning programmes for teachers is the fact that the essence of teaching is about practice. Formal workshops and courses do not always facilitate learning sufficiently for professions like teaching which have a practical component. Due to the practical nature of teaching, researchers advocate that teacher learning is situated in their workplaces (Knight, 2002; Kelly, 2006; Wilson and Berne, 1999).

It is for this reason that researchers like Fraser *et al.* (2007) call for alternatives to learning in “delivered” activities for teachers. They recommend a socio-cultural interpretation of teacher learning, where there is “individual teacher autonomy” and where collaboration and “collective decision- making” are supported, (*ibid*, p.166). Other authors also claim that all forms of learning are important in teacher development, therefore suggest that a way be found where all forms of learning work in a “systemic relationship” (Knight, 2002, p.230) Day and Sachs (2004) and Burns *et al.* (2005).

Formal learning has a place in teachers’ learning but it serves a different purpose from informal learning. It offers teachers a structured programme in which learning takes place and is most often facilitated by an expert. Since the costs of maintaining on site support and receiving feedback from teachers are often prohibitive. Thus, preference is given to one shot workshops and courses. Workshops, which rely on the cascading model to spread the learning, are however, fraught with many logistical problems, the biggest one being the “innovation” being “morphed into different shapes at different sites,” (Knight, 2002, p.235). Therefore for teachers to gain maximum benefit in their development they need to engage in both types of learning.

2.5. INFORMAL LEARNING

Informal learning contrasts with formal learning in the following ways: it does not entail a formal curriculum, it is often unplanned, learning is implicit, emphasis is on learning rather than on the learner, learning is usually collaborative and collegial and learning is contextualised (Hager,2001).

While not a new concept, informal learning has not been given merit for its contribution to teacher learning and development. Knight (2002) suggests that informal learning is undervalued. While recent studies reveal the merits of teachers engaging in informal learning, there still appears to be some resistance in deviating from traditional norms of learning being enshrined in formal learning. Further, since informal learning can be spontaneous and unplanned, few recognise it as learning.

There is a notion that experience is a key component to teachers’ learning, especially with regard to experienced teachers. Informal learning recognises the value of learning from

experience. Experience improves teacher performance, (Wilson and Demetriou, 2007) however, Hagger *et al.* (2008) caution that while experience can result in proficiency, it does not guarantee expertise. This implies that teacher learning is non-linear. Informal learning embraces the broader context of teacher development by acknowledging factors like attitudes, perceptions, and aspirations that infiltrate teacher development.

There is increasing evidence in research that teachers are beginning to attach more value to learning informally and acknowledge the impact such learning is having on their jobs (Knight, 2002; Burns and Schaefer, 2003).

Informal learning opportunities allow learning to be tailored for particular teachers, as teachers can seek what they need from sources they trust. Informal learning opportunities expand the reservoir of opportunities to include both planned and unplanned learning opportunities. In this way teachers can seek what they need from sources they trust in a planned way or learn spontaneously from their interaction with their environment and colleagues. Learning for the teacher then, has relevance and value because teachers are not only getting what they need to improve their practice or performance but also because on site support is available from their colleagues.

The advantage that informal learning has over formal learning is that it can happen on site and also be unplanned. In this way the context actually supports the learning that happens. Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) also favour informal learning claiming that traditional fragmented approaches like the event deliveries Knight (2002) describes do not allow for rigorous, cumulative learning. In fact, Burns *et al.* (2005, p.1) found that informal learning facilitated skills being learnt “on the job.”

Burns *et al.* (2005) argue that formal training is isolated from “the day to day work setting” making the relevance of predetermined outcomes and specific objectives underlining formal programmes questionable in terms of job performance. Research is making it clear that both forms of learning (formal and informal) are necessary in assisting teachers with “conceptions of content and pedagogy” and fitting their roles in classrooms (Kwakman, 2003, p. 150). It is fast emerging that teachers need to develop beyond what mere transmission of knowledge offers. Teachers need more in the form of participation in their

learning. As researchers indicate, teachers are life-long learners and therefore need to be involved in activities and processes that promote and enhance professional development. Teacher development needs to be balanced between formal and informal learning.

Informal learning then, encourages teachers to work together by sharing knowledge, skills, experiences and invariably supporting each other in their development. I believe, in addition that another important merit of this form of learning is that it encourages teachers to take ownership of their learning. Shulman and Shulman (2004, p. 264) declared that it is important for teachers to “become more conscious of their own understandings and dispositions.” By taking ownership of their learning teachers will pay particular attention to their practice. In this way learning becomes meaningful for teachers as it would be addressing their specific needs rather than having what others think they need imposed on them. This in turn encourages teachers to learn by trial and error, networking and mentoring in a relaxed manner rather than from theoretical jargon imposed by a higher authority. Research by Day and Sachs (2004) Wilson and Berne (1999) and Little (1994) attest that an approach that is not top-down makes teachers more receptive to learning, to change and to trying new ideas, thereby strengthening their practice.

Informal learning is not always a conscious effort to learn. It often occurs in a rather implicit/ tacit manner and according to Hager (2001) can be described as “seamless know how.”

The nature of informal learning being spontaneous, its ability to occur within the working environment and the absence of specific learning objectives and predicted outcomes makes such learning “user friendly” and easily accessible, (Burns *et al.*, 2005).

2.6. INFORMAL LEARNING IN SOUTH AFRICA

Research into informal learning in South Africa is limited. While South African researchers, Mestry *et al.* (2009) Abrahams (1997) and Graven (2004) have alluded to the merits of informal learning there appears to be little research that fully describes teachers learning informally in South Africa.

However from the few studies conducted, it is evident that teachers in South African schools do engage in informal learning in similar ways as teachers in studies abroad. An example of this is the teachers in Abraham's (1997) study who showed that in a South African school the staffroom proved to be an active learning congregational space. This study aligns closely with the findings of Mawhinney's (2010) study in a US school, implying that the leaning towards researching informal teacher learning in South African schools perhaps has begun albeit on a much smaller scale.

Both studies indicated that teachers are more comfortable sharing in congregational spaces and that such learning supports teachers in their development. Contradictory results, however, were yielded in a study conducted by Whitelaw *et al.* (2008) in a South African school. Their study indicated that novice teachers avoided the staffroom and there was little sense of community. In fact they argue that it is very difficult for novice teachers to fit into a community of experienced teachers, thus the attrition of newly qualified teachers. This study draws attention to the fact that South African teachers need to be more aware of including novice teachers into their communities. This also depends on how supportive the school is as a site of learning and on the school creating opportunities for teachers to engage in learning.

In South Africa, the higher echelons in the form of education authorities or school management have capitalised on professional development programmes to evaluate teacher competences, thus diverting the true essence of such programmes. The formulation of Integrated Quality Management Systems (IQMS) by the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) in South Africa was intended to improve education by developing teachers (IQMS Collective Agreement 8 of 2003). However, not driving advocacy sufficiently, once off training, challenges of cascading information and resistance by teachers to policy change have compromised teacher development significantly (Mestry *et al.*, 2009). Event delivery forms of professional development usually fail because they are not sustained. Ramnarain (2009) found that there are many factors that contribute to the failure of IQMS in South African schools. She argues that such a policy has to be more than "an accountability device" (Ramnarain, 2009, p.191). She claims that one of the reasons that IQMS is failing in schools is "the lack of capacity throughout the education system," (*ibid*, p. 82).

This attempt by the DoE may be described as “contrived” as the instrument only masquerades as a development strategy for teachers (Hargreaves, 1995 cited in Abrahams, 1997). It is thus not difficult to understand Knight’s (2002, p.230) contention that formal professional learning is “just not fit for all the purposes to which it is applied.” Using the failure of IQMS in South African schools to do what it set out to, I suggest that it is time to pay heed to what researchers are propagating about teacher development. It cannot be just a top-down approach.

Currently the stakeholders in South African education are introducing a revised plan in the hope of addressing teacher development effectively in schools. The Integrated Strategic Management Plan Framework for Teacher Development in Education, 2011 – 2025 considers the importance of teachers identifying their needs and engaging in meaningful learning opportunities. It is hoped that by improving teacher development, teacher practice would also improve. Hopefully the vision of this plan will be realised within the stipulated period.

Being a teacher requires one to develop different forms of knowledge. Studies have shown that by teachers engaging in learning opportunities they invariably extend their knowledge. The development of teacher knowledge impacts directly on teacher learning and therefore on teacher development.

2.7. TEACHER KNOWLEDGE

There are various forms of knowledge that teachers require in order to engage in the professional practice of teaching. Shulman (1986) pioneered the important work in the field of teacher knowledge. He lists seven forms of teaching knowledge:

1. Content knowledge – Mathematics, Science, Art, Geography, etc.
2. General pedagogic knowledge – knowledge of principles and strategies for curriculum and class management in general.
3. Curriculum knowledge – knowledge of the materials and programmes that are tools of the trade.

4. Pedagogical content knowledge – a “... special amalgam of content and pedagogy ... [teachers] own special form of professional understanding.” (Shulman, 1987, p.8)
5. Knowledge of learners and their characteristics.
6. Knowledge of educational contexts – of the characteristics and effects of groups, classrooms, school district and administration, communities and cultures.
7. Knowledge of “...educational ends, purposes, and values and their philosophical and historical grounds”(Shulman, 1987, p.8)

(Shulman, 1987, p.8)

His work has provided a sound foundation for subsequent studies that other authors have built on. Knight (2002) narrows the significant forms of knowledge relevant to two broad forms of teacher learning viz. procedural and propositional knowledge. This is corroborated by Wilson and Demetriou (2007) who categorise teacher knowledge into “codified academic knowledge” and practical knowledge which are synonymous with propositional and procedural knowledge respectively. These researchers claim that these different kinds of knowledge are learnt differently. They explain that procedural knowledge is learnt informally and propositional knowledge is learnt formally. I will explain below how all of the above interpretations lead to a common understanding.

2.7.1. PROPOSITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND FORMAL LEARNING

Propositional knowledge is also known as codified academic knowledge. This refers to knowledge which is retrieved from textual material like books, research, policies etc. It is “higher order knowledge” and deals with “sense- making and meaning” (Knight, 2002). Thus propositional knowledge would be best learnt through formal learning. The seven forms of knowledge that Shulman (1986) lists are propositional. Kelly (2006) refers to propositional knowledge as “knowledge-of-practice.”

2.7.2. PROCEDURAL KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Where propositional knowledge is textual based, procedural knowledge is context specific and is acquired mostly informally through social participation, (Wilson and Demetriou, 2007;

Eraut, 2007). Wilson and Demetriou (2007, p.215) draw our attention to the point that “this form of knowledge is difficult to make explicit or to represent in a textual form.” Similarly, Eraut (2007) who calls this cultural knowledge claims that the merits of this knowledge go unnoticed due to its implicit nature. Similarly Knight (2002, p.230) speaks of practical knowledge which deals with “sensori-motor and cognitive skills” (ibid). It deals with learning to do. Knowledge-in- practice “is a dynamic process resulting from the collaborative actions of teachers and students together in the context of their own work,” (Kelly, 2006, p.510).

Researchers have found that both forms of knowledge are needed for professional development of teachers. These knowledges need to work in tandem in creating holistic teacher development. Turner-Bisset (1999, p.52) argues that it is dangerous to focus “only on teaching skills and competences” as “reasoning, thinking and synthesis underpin the best teaching.” This draws attention to the value of teachers’ emotional dispositions, beliefs and expectations as well.

Thus acquiring knowledge is pertinent to teacher development. Teacher development in turn hinges on teachers’ engagement with their contexts as recommended by researchers who advocate that teacher learning is situated (Hager, 2001; Erikson *et al.*, 2005; Wilson and Berne, 1999).

2.8. THEORIES OF LEARNING: SITUATED LEARNING

There are two different theories of teacher learning; a cognitive approach and a situated approach. The cognitive approach views teacher learning in a somewhat linear perspective.

According to cognitive theorists,

Individuals acquire skills, knowledge and understandings in one setting, often specifically designed for that purpose, and are subsequently able to use these skills, knowledge and understandings elsewhere. (Kelly, 2006, p.506).

This implies that knowledge is purely cognitive, easily transferable and individual. Socio cultural theorists however, argue that teacher learning is far more complex than that and that it is situated. This study is informed by this theory.

The situated perspective – “knowing and learning are situated in physical and social contexts, social in nature, and distributed across persons and tool” (Putnam and Borko, 2000, p.12) provides a good foundation for researchers to explore how and where teachers learn.

Researchers within this perspective contend that teacher learning is situated in their working context (Kwakman, 2003; Knight, 2002; Lieberman and Mace, 2009). They argue that the practical nature of the job entails learning on site. Thus situated learning is about establishing a link between learning and working. Kwakman (2003, p.150) cites Hargreaves (1997), Moore and Shaw (2000), Retallicck (1999) and Scribbner(1999) who contend that the working context is proposed as the most suitable place to acquire competencies to help teachers fulfill new roles.

Researchers claim that teacher learning takes place in the workplace as a result of “teachers’ participation in everyday activities” (Henze, 2009, p.185). The school and the classroom provide a wealth of learning opportunities on a daily basis. There is no teacher, irrespective of experience, who does not learn something in their working environment daily. Such learning can vary from learning a new method of collating information to teaching a concept differently or perhaps just managing ones time more effectively. These “skills” only avail themselves because of challenges that present themselves in the working environment and might only work in this particular context and not necessarily in a new one. Thus informal learning by its nature is contextualised. The teacher and environment should work in a reciprocal manner (Davis and Luthans, 1980 cited in Vogel, 2009).

Practice helps teachers to delve into their reservoir of knowledge as demanded by the challenges that they encounter. For example, in my own experience as an English teacher, I noticed that many of my learners do not like to read therefore do not prepare for reading assessments. To encourage them to enjoy reading I introduced a news-reading segment (lesson) on a weekly basis. The need to look good, sound professional and be more creative than the last group elicited more enthusiasm from the learners than I had ever hoped for. Kelly (2006) advocates that teacher learning involves teachers constructing their own knowledge base within their particular circumstances to address specific problems they might have identified. I could have chosen to continue my testing in the traditional way

ignoring the fact that learners do not like to read, but my intervention injected enthusiasm in them which in turn improved their reading efforts for this task. I felt compelled to find a method that I thought would make reading a conscious and enjoyable effort for them. This particular exercise would not be necessary in a class of learners who enjoy reading. The environment I was working in determined how I would teach the learners. It would seem then, that the working context or environment is instrumental to how teachers develop in their profession.

As situated learning is about learning in the working context, it is crucial that working contexts should encourage and sustain learning. It is important for schools to transform into sites of learning, providing opportunities for teachers to learn. Learning happens on site as a result of teachers' engagement with their jobs and interaction with others. Putnam and Borko (2000 cited in Erickson *et al.*, 2005, p.788) declare that situated learning makes it "likely that what they learn will influence and support their teaching practice in meaningful ways." Current research shows that there is a tendency now for teachers to talk more about their teaching experiences and share their knowledge and ideas about teaching, (Knight, 2002; Putnam and Borko, 2000; Mawhinney, 2010). Many teachers admit that they do experiment with shared ideas in their classrooms. Kwakman (2003, p.150) presents a similar view that teacher learning has to be facilitated by creating favourable learning environments in which teachers take charge of their own learning.

Professional development programmes must be geared towards helping teachers cope with the task of their day to day teaching and functioning in their classrooms (Miles, 1992; Putnam and Borko, 2000). They argue that teacher learning must take place in the actual classroom. Studies show that the classroom offers teachers the best insight into the reality of their jobs. How teachers cope and to what extent they are competent does not evolve solely from the amount of propositional knowledge they have but from how they are able to adjust to the constantly changing demands of being in the classroom. Thus the teacher plays a significant role in her development by identifying her needs and accessing development to satisfy that particular need.

Apart from engaging in knowledge-in-practice, Kelly (2006, p.515) also posits that teacher learning includes the "development of situated identities." Knowledge-in-practice

(propositional) or tacit knowledge (procedural) both, allude to the “situated nature of professional practice,” (*ibid*). Tacit knowledge is grounded in the practice of teaching, while knowledge-in-practice pertains to learning from collaboration between students and the working environment.

Informal learning requires that teachers are amenable to working with each other and learning from and with each other. Learning informally is underpinned by interacting with the environment and others. It is therefore important for teachers to work with the environment and their colleagues in order to sustain meaningful teacher learning. This was evident in Marsick and Watkins’ (1997 cited in Burns and Schaefer 2003, p.3) learning model which suggests that the “workplace is primary for shaping learning, problem definition, problem solving and reflection.”

While the classroom can facilitate teacher learning in terms of how much one could learn, opportunities to learn informally also exist outside the class. Therefore, Kwakman (2003, p.152) and Putnam and Borko (2000 cited in Kwakman, 2003, p.150) recommend that teacher learning be situated in multiple settings. One way of doing this is by establishing learning communities that extend beyond classrooms and can positively influence whole school development, (Darling-Hammond and Richardson, 2000). Teachers liaising in a broader network, like those discussed below, are exposed to a wider range of thoughts and ideas as well as knowledge about and insights into contexts other than their own.

2.9. LEARNING COMMUNITIES

One way of situating learning in the workplace is to establish learning communities. Learning communities are also referred to as communities of practice, communities of learners, knowledge communities, professional learning communities, discourse communities, work groups and congregational spaces (Wilson and Berne, 1999; Darling – Hammond and Richardson, 2009). Ohlson and Craig (2001 cited in Erikson 2005 *et al.*, p.796) describe knowledge communities as a safe place where “teachers authentically share their stories of practice.” They claim that such sharing helps to “make personal practical knowledge explicit to themselves and to others.”

Vogel (2009) defines communities of practice as “an informal group of people pursuing a joint enterprise sharing a repertoire of communal resources and engaging mutually.” This definition embraces the interactive nature of communities of practice. It also brings to the fore the relaxed atmosphere in which learning can take place highlighting the sense of support and encouragement, rather than that of evaluating and judging.

Learning in communities is fast becoming a norm in schools abroad like Australia, Germany and Netherlands as illustrated in research conducted by Erickson *et al.* (2005), Vogel (2009) and Henze (2009). Teachers are liaising more with each other not only to share ideas but also to sound out techniques, strategies or even just vent in frustration when things don't go according to plan. Research shows that communities of practice are contributing greatly to teacher learning.

Learning communities may allow teachers to emerge with their true identities as individuals and as professionals. They create the space for teachers to “construct their own knowledge base for teaching in their own circumstances with a view of their problems” (Kelly 2006, p.509). Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009, p.49) therefore argue that professional learning communities not only encourages the development of more effective practices but also provides “ongoing opportunities for collegial work.” Membership of learning communities ensures that there is exposure to hands-on learning and that crucially; learning is sustained over a period of time.

Being part of a community offers teachers the opportunity to relate to other teachers teaching the same content or facing similar problems as they are. Learning in a community can happen both formally, as in subject committee meetings or informally by chatting off the record about something that would help you in the classroom. Often, teachers who meet at workshops or cluster meetings invariably maintain informal contact, sharing or exchanging ideas and information regarding their practice. Lieberman and Mace (2009, p.227) also note the merits of teachers belonging to learning communities. They argue that there is increasing evidence that teachers learn best when they are members of a community. Thus they recommend that professional development should be entrenched in learning communities but caution that professional development should also occur in formal, external workshops. Their study indicates how teachers develop in a community,

how teachers can become “socialised into a collaborative culture and become more attuned to the complexity and ambiguity of their classroom work” (*ibid*, p.229).

The communities of practice are built around the idea that sharing helps to create new ideas and thoughts. Further researchers suggest that personal practical knowledge can be made explicit in such communities (Erickson et al. 2005). It was noted that teachers who are members of such communities bring individual discourses that coalesce with those of others to form new discourses (Wilson and Borko, 1999). By sharing in communities new opportunities exist for further learning for teachers.

The social cultural perspective of learning establishes learning as social and situated within its context. Vogel (2009) explored the theories of both Schon (1983) and Wenger (1998) who respectively advocate that learning is embedded in reflective practice and communities of practice. Their views also differ in that Schon looks at individuals learning informally while Wenger’s approach embraces collective informal learning in communities of practice.

I think it is important at this point to reiterate that learning is both individual and social and that learning is not situated only in ones classroom but extends beyond even the school. When executing their jobs, teachers often get to interact with teachers from other schools during sporting events, excursions, co curricular meetings etc. During this interaction there exists an opportunity to exchange and share ideas. This is confirmed by Kwakman (2003, p. 151) who advocates that researchers adopt a “broader view on the working context” to include “various types of communities, networks, school university partnerships.”

I will now look at how informal learning can happen in this social atmosphere. The word “social” implies that communication is an important factor in learning in this way. Erickson *et al.* (2005) argue that learning communities enhance the opportunities for professional development. This is because learning communities encourage teachers to work collaboratively extending and building knowledge.

Mawhinney’s (2010) research indicates that there is a direct connection between teachers’ lounges where informal learning occurs and the classroom. She found that informal learning made teachers think about improving their practice and the ideas from learning communities infiltrated classrooms. This method of learning would fall into Reid’s quadrant

(Mckinney, 2005, cited in Fraser, 2007) of informal incidental learning. Mawhinney (2010) defines such interaction as professional knowledge sharing where teachers exchange information which results in supporting their development. While it appears straightforward, the process of sharing professional knowledge can become complex as it hinges on dealing with multiple individuals and therefore different beliefs, attitudes, perceptions in a community.

Again the idea of working as a team is developed since such complexities can only be overcome by negotiating and reconstructing ideas and beliefs. It creates a healthy, interactive relationship with those involved. Sharing and exchanging information will also encourage teachers to use their colleagues as sounding boards for new innovations that they might be contemplating introducing in their classrooms. Mawhinney (2010) expands on the concepts of “collective sense-making” and “stock taking” initiated by British researcher, Hammersly (1984) cited in Mawhinney (2010). This implies that it is imperative for teachers to engage in introspection, robust debate and discussion about teaching and learning as well as their individual practice. Collegiality must therefore be encouraged to thrive in a favourable way within institutions. Her study highlights that incidental learning is significant in professional development.

Lieberman and Mace (2009) criticise traditional methods of professional development for instilling “a culture of compliance.” They insist that professional development must create conditions for teachers to learn from each other, “people learn from and with others in particular ways” (Lieberman and Mace, 2009, p.227). They thus recommend that professional development should be entrenched in learning communities.

Further, Collinson *et al.* (2009, p.3) also argue that teachers’ participation in policy making and CPD hinges on a collaborative model. Within the quandary of how and where teachers learn best, lies unanimous agreement that successful education strategies emerge from collaborative work of all stakeholders. Learning to teach entails teachers becoming “enculturated” into the teaching community, ie. “learning to think, talk and act as a teacher” (Borko and Putnam 2000, p.9). This, I think, encapsulates the notion of teaching being socially constructed.

An example of collaborative learning was evident when teachers in the Northern suburbs of Pietermaritzburg rallied together to make sense of the new curriculum, post 1994. Teachers from different schools shared resources, lesson plans, rubrics and assessment recording strategies to help them implement changes that reform demanded and the Department of Education (DoE) failed to support. The initiative was initiated and driven by teachers who found themselves in dire need therefore the learning was informal within that particular learning community. Putnam and Borko (2000, p.8) reiterate the point that the discourse communities are an avenue to “draw upon and incorporate each other’s expertise to create rich conversations and new insights into teaching and learning.” It is necessary for teachers to be given the opportunity be a part of communities where new materials and strategies are discussed.

Mawhinney (2010) also makes an important observation in her study that informal learning supports spontaneous collaboration which feeds into the classroom. Paine *et al.* (2003) refers to informal conversations helping new teachers build knowledge from teachers as “beehive activity” (Paine *et al.* 2003 cited in Mawhinney, 2010, p.974). Essentially that is what teacher learning and development is all about – not necessarily changing practice, but being aware of it so that one does not get “stuck in the rut” or become lost as a dysfunctional teacher because the world of education is far too dynamic for teachers to resist change and still remain relevant and empowered. Researchers like Eraut (1995) and Hoyle and John (1995, cited in Knight 2002, p.153) confirm this when they attest that “unlearning routines is a first step in changing practices, and thus in improving the quality of teaching and learning.”

Another benefit of informal learning is that it steers teachers away from isolation. Mawhinney (2010, p.977) confirms that “isolation can cause teachers to lose interest in their work and the school itself.” Her study indicates that isolation can be overcome by co-workers working collaboratively. Whitelaw *et al.* (2008) draw attention to how overwhelmed teachers can feel if they feel isolated. One must be cautioned, however, that this does not mean that learning cannot be self-directed. Research recommends that individual learning can happen within or alongside the collaborative model.

Working with others as opposed to working alone helps teachers to stay in touch with current trends. Teachers forge better relationships with each other as they work towards a common goal. Putnam and Borko's (2000) study indicates that the combined experiences of teachers in communities helps to develop different conceptions of ideas and deeper understandings of learning and teaching. Such communities can also be used to introduce new ideas and practices and support the integration of this learning into classroom practice. This indicates that learning can be ongoing, supported and adapted to suit teachers needs. They suggest that learning is distributed across persons and is thus not individual.

Learning communities are favoured for its potential not only to provide support for members in the community, but also for its ability to foster confidence in teachers. Graven's (2004) research indicates that "active participation in practices of communities," resulted in the manifestations of trust and confidence building among colleagues (Graven, 2004, p.182).

The dialogue that results in communities of practice will also stimulate a sense of trust as sharing can only take place within a trusting relationship. This in turn will help to boost confidence in those who feel inadequate because they will feel a sense of caring and empowerment that prevails in learning communities.

Confidence in teaching impacts greatly on deliverance in the classroom. Graven (2004) illustrates in her study how confidence is a product and process of learning. One way of gaining confidence is to talk to others about challenges, strategies that work or don't and sharing ideas on how to handle particular challenges. Often such interaction reveals that those challenges are not necessarily weaknesses of the teacher and that others face similar dilemmas. Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2000, p. 48) point out that communities of practice allow teachers to "raise issues, take risks and address dilemmas in their own practice" which implies that teachers are confident and trusting of each other to "expose" their needs and "weaknesses" to their colleagues. Mawhinney (2010) also observed how professional knowledge sharing "fostered confidence" in her participants. Thus, discourse communities, as argued by (Putnam and Borko, 2005, p.5) provide "cognitive tools" to enhance learning in a social context and results in developing self confidence in teachers.

Another way in which teachers can develop confidence is by being mentored. Mentoring is usually perceived as a formal structure of learning, however recently it is emerging as a benefit of informal learning. It is a helpful form of support and learning for teachers and is usually implemented in rather formal contexts in schools. Teachers like those Shulman and Shulman (2004) describe as accomplished often find themselves mentoring their fellow workers or being mentored themselves. In an informal context like chatting in the staffroom the power dynamics between novice and veteran teachers seem to blur thus promoting “interactive professionalism,” (Mawhinney, 2010, p. 974). In this way teachers can be groomed to imbibe skills, address weaknesses, empower themselves and build confidence in a mutually beneficial relationship. Whitelaw *et al.* (2008) found that the lack of mentoring in the South African school they researched resulted in novice teachers feeling inadequate and isolated. Mentoring then is a two way process where learning extends across and between mentor and mentee and experienced and novice teachers. Thus teachers are offered the opportunity to engage in ongoing learning.

The development of teachers’ practice depends on how teachers engage in ongoing learning. Teacher learning has been in the spotlight in recent research and there is consensus that teacher development is about continuing development or life-long learning. Life-long learning refers to learning that takes place throughout the teachers’ experience of teaching. Hager (2001) defines life long learning as that learning which embraces learning in any type of setting. This implies that the context of learning can be both formal and informal. Knight (2002) claims that if teachers do not engage in life-long learning they run the risk of no longer being useful in the education system (obsolescence) therefore some teachers are now playing an active role in identifying their areas of need for development and in accessing knowledge that they think they need. In this study, when teachers engaged in various ways to identify their needs and access different forms of learning, they were engaging in lifelong learning. This is called self –directed learning.

2.10. CONCLUSION

This chapter has described teacher learning as a process that occurs in a range of different ways in different environments. According to Reid’s quadrants of teacher learning, opportunities may be analysed as either formal or non formal and planned or incidental

(Fraser *et al.* 2007). Formal opportunities are those that are usually didactic and led by an expert (such as professional development workshops or taught courses) whereas informal opportunities are often self – directed, or in collaboration with other teachers. The literature points to the importance of both formal and informal learning in the professional development of teachers. The specific focus of this study is teachers’ informal learning.

This chapter has also shown that in many current teacher education programmes, particularly in countries like USA, Netherlands, Australia and Germany, there is a shift towards greater recognition of informal learning. Locally, research in a South African school shows that teachers are finding merit in self - directed learning and recent government policy advocates the development of school-based learning communities. The chapter that follows will discuss the methodology of the research.

CHAPTER 3

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will outline the methodology used to investigate how informal learning occurs in a secondary school. I will first explain why I chose to use the methodology of case study. Then I will discuss the particular case, which is of informal learning in one secondary school. Thereafter I will describe the various data collection methods used. Finally, I will highlight the limitations of the study.

3.2. THE RESEARCH PARADIGM

As the research is set in the “natural environment” of the group of teachers in the study, the research is set in the interpretivist paradigm. Embedded in this paradigm is the social constructionist approach to research which focuses on the “social collaborative process of bringing meaning and knowledge” (Vine, 2009). This makes this paradigm suitable for this case study as I endeavour to illustrate that informal learning is both social and collaborative.

I set the study in the “natural environment” so that I could understand how the teachers’ working context supports their informal learning. Further, teachers’ interactions, which are one of the ways in which teachers learn informally, happen at school or in communities of practice either in or out of school. As I hoped to get teachers’ personal accounts of how their learning happens informally I thought it best to locate the study in the “natural environment”. Further, since learning is informal and situated, the context of the study must be the “natural environment”.

Burrell and Morgan (1979 cited in Bassey 1999) claim that the social world is made up of an interaction of humans resulting in “intersubjectivity shared meaning.” This study aims to understand the concept of informal learning from the perceptions of teachers at the school. The interpretivist paradigm allows for varying interpretations of the same concept within the same context. Researchers claim that it is possible for the same reality to be perceived differently, (Bassey, 1999). Thus, the study used various methods to track the teachers’ perceptions of their learning within the same context.

3.3. CASE STUDY AS A METHODOLOGY

This small scale, qualitative research aims to explore how novice and experienced teachers learn informally in a secondary school. To answer the research questions: How do novice and experienced teachers learn informally at a secondary school? To what extent does informal learning contribute to teachers learning and professional development? What factors support/ impede informal teacher learning at the school? I decided to use a case study approach. The data were collected within a time frame of two months and within one secondary school.

Since my study investigates how teachers learn in their contexts; tries to interpret to what extent teachers learn informally and ascertains teachers' perspectives on informal teacher learning, this study is largely qualitative. Further, the study takes place in the teachers' natural settings allowing for the "lived experience" to come through. In this way I hope to get an in-depth understanding of how teachers learn. Researchers believe that a qualitative approach to research allows for a broader spectrum of responses and allows the flexibility of adapting to new developments during the process of the research. I felt that this flexibility would allow for richer data to be collected.

I chose case study methodology because I hoped to delve into how teachers believed they learnt in the school setting. In order to understand their conceptions and perceptions of their learning I needed to use a method that would make explicit how they learnt. One of the ways of reaching that depth was to explore the participants lived experiences. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, p.185) case study allows the researcher to "probe deeply" and "analyse intensively" the "lifestyle of the unit." The case study method suited my study by making it possible to carry out an in-depth investigation of how teachers learnt informally in their school.

Case studies are useful when investigating "real life activities in depth" (Yin, 1994 cited in Mohd Noor, 2008, p. 1602, Boucher, 2000). In order to gain an understanding of the "real life activities" which in the case of this study is teachers' informal learning at a school, I chose a group of teachers who were the participants. Each individual teacher formed the unit of analysis in the study therefore there are five units of analysis. This is a single case

study of teacher learning within one secondary school. Case studies do however allow for multiple case studies to be done. This study is a case of informal teacher learning.

Case studies have the characteristic of being longitudinal ie. they extend over a period of time. In this study, the respondents were given a period of two months to work on their journals and photographs. The purpose of these multiple sources of data was to offer respondents an opportunity to provide a detailed account of their learning by expressing their perspectives. Case studies make such detail possible because “case studies are designed to bring out details from the viewpoint of the participants by using multiple sources of data” (Tellis, 1997, p.1).

While there is criticism from some researchers against this method as it fails to deal with the issue of generalisability and it “lacks scientific rigour”, case study has been found to provide rather rich data. This is enhanced by the fact that it requires multiple methods to collect data.

With regard to the issue of case studies lacking generalisability Yin (1984 cited in Tellis 1997) and Flyvbjerg (2006) reject claims that case studies are not generalisable. Yin (1984 cited in Tellis 1997, p.2) claims that analytic generalisation rather than statistical generalisation can be used “to compare empirical results of the case study”. Flyvbjerg (2006, p.3) maintains that by strategic selection “one may arrive at case studies that allow generalisation”. Further Stake (1995 cited in Tellis 1997, p.2) refers to a term “naturalistic generalisation” which suggests that generalisations are made by the reader.

3.4. OTHER STUDIES ON INFORMAL LEARNING

Contemporary researchers like Kwakman (2003) and Mawhinney (2010) have investigated this phenomenon of teachers’ learning informally. Their studies indicate that informal forms of learning have contributed greatly to teacher development. They also attest that teacher learning is situated in the workplace. Research shows that how teachers learn and what they learn are embedded in the jobs they do.

Mawhinney (2010) used observations and semi structured interviews in her study to investigate a similar phenomenon. She observed three groups of teachers then conducted

interviews with each teacher separately to gain their perspectives on ‘the occurrences and interactions’ in the lunchrooms. Her data revealed that informal teacher interactions support teacher development in schools.

Kwakman (2003) conducted a survey by means of a survey administered to teachers in 10 schools which were purposively selected. He measured teachers’ participation in professional learning activities like coaching and learning communities.

I chose to use case study as it allowed the use of different methods of data collection. I thought it would offer a better insight into the teachers lived experiences and in turn provide in-depth data to understand the way informal learning unfolds in this particular school.

3.5. THE SCHOOL

The research site is a secondary school in the Northern suburbs of Pietermaritzburg, Kwa Zulu - Natal. The learner enrolment for the year 2010 was 1 389. Staffing was as follows:

	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
STATE PAID TEACHERS	22	20	42
SGB PAID TEACHERS	1	6	7
TOTAL	23	26	49

Table 1: STAFFING 2010

The management of the school constitutes: the principal, 2 deputy principals and 5 heads of department. The principal fills the post in an acting capacity.

There are many primary schools in the surrounding vicinity, making this high school much sought after for admission. Most learners come from the middle to upper income group and are able to comfortably afford the school fee of R1 750 per annum. Those who cannot are granted fee concessions based on an assessment of the parents’ monthly income.

The school started out as a House of Delegates school which served only 'Indian' children during the apartheid era but subsequent to that the learner demographics has changed. Although it maintains a majority of Indian learners, its learner population includes other race groups and nationalities.

The ethos of the school reflects a strong commitment by all stakeholders. The school's governing body works closely with the school. There are a number of sub committees that work towards the smooth running of the school. These core committees include: discipline, finance, maintenance, sport, admission and fund raising. These committees are made up of both School Governing Body (SGB) members and staff. Learner representation is invited to meetings if and when deemed necessary.

The school subscribes to a strict code of conduct for both teachers and learners. The functionality of the school is governed by mutually agreed ethics. One of these is punctuality for both teachers and learners. Another is a respect for the culture of learning. There is constant supervision and support for teachers to ensure that meaningful interaction happens in the class.

One of the key issues the school is grappling with is discipline. Discipline problems include: uniform default, late coming, homework not done, and smoking, among other minor misdemeanors. The school uses a policy of demerits and detention to deal with such cases. Staff workshops facilitated by the schools' management and liaisons with the school's guidance counsellor are strategies employed to help staff deal with these issues.

The fund raising and maintenance committees have worked hard to upgrade the schools infrastructure. Apart from routine maintenance, the school was able to set up a fully functional media centre with internet access for learners and staff. All classrooms are fitted with air conditioners and security at the school is ensured by monitored cameras and 24 hour security guards.

Another valuable resource is the school hall which often doubles up as an examination centre. It can accommodate approximately 200 learners in an examination. It is also used for parent meetings, workshops, career talks etc.

The school enjoys Section 21 status. This means that the school provides its own funding. The school provides learners with stationery packs and textbooks on loan at the start of each year.

Each learning area has its own set of computers for educators to use for their administration purposes. Most of the computers are networked and teachers are compelled to keep electronic record of all documentation.

While the school's sporting facilities are poor, learners have defied the odds and excelled in many codes of sport. The school's volleyball team recently won a national tournament in Cape Town. Teachers attend coaching clinics to help learners in the necessary codes.

Learners are also exposed to many co-curricular activities. These are made up of Olympiads like Harmony Gold (Mathematics) and Amesa (Mathematics); Hip 2 be square (Science Foundation founded by Mark Shuttleworth to promote Mathematics and Science) – two learners from the school were chosen as part of this group this year; The Natal Witness school's quiz; The Nelson Mandela speech contest – a learner was selected as runner up this year.

Apart from the academic emphasis learners are provided with opportunities to focus on social awareness and responsibilities. They are urged to get involved in community projects like fund raising for CANSA, HOSPICE, SPCA; providing meals or food hampers for the less fortunate; supporting the winter warmth drives and some even stage mini concerts and prepare gift packs for LSEN schools. At school each class is given the opportunity to provide lunch for the indigent learners in the school. In this way indigent learners are catered for daily.

In the last two years the school's top achievers in grade 11 were awarded the opportunity to be exchange students in the United States by the People to People project. This proved to be an amazing experience for learners and certainly an incentive to strive for excellence.

The community supports the school well. Small businesses in the area always rally together in supporting the school on its various fund raising drives. In this way many of the endeavours have exceeded the school's expectations.

The school's aspirations are often exemplified in the National Senior Certificate Examination (NSC) where it has earned a reputation for being the top achieving high school in the area.

3.6. SAMPLING

The study comprises a group of five teachers from different learning areas within the secondary school just described, which was purposively selected. The participants in the study comprised three experienced teachers and two novice teachers in this secondary school.

The table below reflects the group.

TEACHERS: EXPERIENCED/NOVICE	GENDER	LEARNING AREA + PHASE	YEARS TEACHING EXPERIENCE
1/ EXPERIENCED	MALE	ACCOUNTING – FET	23
2/EXPERIENCED	FEMALE	TRAVEL AND TOURISM – FET + TECHNOLOGY – GET	26
3/EXPERIENCED	FEMALE	AFRIKAANS - GET + FET	38
1/NOVICE	FEMALE	ENGLISH – GET + FET	1
2/NOVICE	FEMALE	ENGLISH - GET + LIFE ORIENTATION GET	1

Table 2: SAMPLE OF GROUP OF TEACHERS

I deliberately selected experienced teachers from different learning areas to get a varied perception and understanding of teachers' perceptions of how they learn. To ensure that

respondents came from different learning areas I approached particular educators and explained the nature of the study. Those that I approached were very intrigued by the study and expressed interest in participating. However, after answering their questions on what how they would be involved, I suggested that they think over whether they would want to participate. The next day all participants voluntarily expressed their desire to be a part of the study.

It was coincidental that the novice teachers shared a learning area. My intention was to get a representation across the school as widely as the study would allow as I hoped to understand the phenomenon of informal learning at this particular school. From the three experienced teachers one is a Head of Department (HoD) and coincidentally the other two both resigned from the profession and returned to the profession- one as a permanent educator and the other as a Governing Body employed educator. One of the teachers cited personal reasons for resigning after 35 years of service. After resigning she taught for a year in Dubai, and then returned to South Africa because of family commitments. The following year she returned to the profession in the capacity of a Governing body employee. Thus, although she resigned, she was still in touch with teaching.

The other teacher left the profession so that she could pursue her interest in business. She resigned after 20 years of teaching. After five years she was ready to return to the profession. She is currently a permanent educator at the school.

I thought that it would be interesting to get an idea of how these two teachers in particular kept up with the changes in education that might have occurred during their absences. With regard to the HoD, I wanted to include a perception and conception of teacher learning from someone in a management position. I was mindful of the fact that these were the teacher's own thoughts and in no way represented the views of the management of the school.

The novice teachers were selected as they were the only novice teachers on staff at the time. One of the novice participants was in her final year of the Post Graduate Certificate in Education programme which she was studying part time, while the other was reading for an Honours degree in Education, part time. Both began their teaching careers at this school.

3.7. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Case studies make it possible for different methods to be used to collect data. Since I was hoping to extract rich data which Woods (2006, p.12) calls a “thick description”, a term coined by Geertz (1973), I opted to use multiple data collection methods. Denzin (1989 cited in Woods 2006, p.12) claims that “a thick description goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another.” More importantly he points out that the “voices, feelings, actions and meanings of interacting individuals are heard” (ibid). Thus the methods of data collection employed were meant to tap into the “voices, feelings, actions and meaning” of the participants.

The methods intended to collect data which revealed teachers’ conceptions of informal learning, individual teacher perceptions of how informal teacher learning develops, and how their context supports learning in the workplace. As established earlier, the study is grounded in the theory of situated learning and the nature of learning in social contexts. This makes the study a “bounded system” where issues are indicated, discovered or studied so that one can get a full understanding of the case.

Using multiple methods makes the data more convincing. Further, it provides a multi dimensional profile of the case. Therefore I decided on the following methods to collect data: reflective journals, photo voice: photographs and interviews. According to Woods (2006, p.5)

The qualitative researcher seeks to discover the meanings that participants attach to their behaviour, how they interpret situations and what their perspectives are on particular issues.

These methods were intended to throw light on how these teachers understood teacher learning and participated in learning activities, particularly informal teacher learning activities. All methods of data collection used are equally important to the relevance of the study, therefore they are “complimentary and used in tandem,” (Tellis, 1997, p.7).

3.7.1. JOURNAL ENTRIES

Journal writing offers an opportunity for participants to explore their behaviour, perspectives and engage in critical thinking. In journal writing, one records their experiences, events and reflections on particular issues. The process spans over a period of time. By documenting their thoughts, respondents are able to analyse their thoughts and beliefs. In turn they can learn from their prior and personal experiences. "It reflects back to me things that I can learn about my world and myself," (Moon, 1999, p.14). Davies (2003) admits that his own experience of engaging in journal writing served to enhance his professional understanding and his development of practice.

Journals allow for critical reflection of one's learning. Davies (*ibid*) claims that journals stimulate critical reflection thus producing active learners. Further, Biggs (1999, p.1) wrote,

A reflection in a mirror is an exact replica of what is in front of it. Reflection in professional practice, however, gives back not what is, but what might be an improvement on the original.

I therefore thought that this would be an apt way to gain insight into teachers' perceptions, of how they learnt. This method was likely to inspire teachers to look more closely at the ways that they have been learning and analyse what they learnt and perhaps where they learnt.

In an attempt to track how teachers in the study learnt informally, I therefore asked teachers to keep journals where they will record how they learnt by responding to particular tasks that would guide their thoughts. Examples of the tasks include: reflect on your learning during the week: Describe an incident where you learnt new content knowledge. Why did you have to learn it? How did you learn it? From whom did you learn it? Participants were required to record individual development and perceptions for the duration of the study. They were guided by a set of weekly questions which were intended to stimulate teachers' thoughts on their learning. Some of the questions used to stimulate thought are: What do you understand by the concept teacher learning? Describe an incident where you learnt a new classroom management strategy. How did you learn this? From whom? In what context? Which is the main area that you feel that you need to develop or

change as a teacher? The responses to such questions will give an indication of how teachers accessed knowledge. My interest in their responses lay in how they accessed learning informally and how that learning contributed to their development.

Boyd and Fale (1993 cited in Thorpe, 2002, p. 135) define journaling as a process where an experience that triggers an issue of concern is internally examined and explored. The experience “creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self and which results in a changed conceptual perspective.” They further attest that reflection comprises three stages namely:

- a) Awareness which is stimulated by thought or feelings.
- b) Critical analysis – where one uses relevant knowledge and experiences and application of new knowledge resulting from the analysis process. It involves critical thinking and evaluation thus greater self awareness.
- c) Development of new perspectives which is a result of critical analysis and the application of new knowledge.

They found that it is a useful tool to ‘translate theory’ into practical action.

Since teachers are usually sent to formal workshops to learn, I hoped to redirect their attention to alternate ways of learning. Journal reflections were intended to inspire teachers to explore ways other than formal programmes where learning might have taken place.

Before the writing process began I met with the participants to inform them about what was expected of them during the journaling process. They were briefed about responding to the questions with honesty and sincerity, and were assured of their anonymity.

All participants were given the same set of questions to reflect on. In total, nine weeks of reflection was completed by each of them. This method provides valuable data as the data is “natural and they contain personal meanings and understandings” (Woods, 2006, p.24).

Unfortunately the process was unavoidably delayed due to the month long industrial action embarked on by most teachers in August 2010. The extension of the study resulted in the further challenge of accommodating interviews within the internal examination schedule

and journals being handed in later than initially scheduled. All journals were handed in after the nine entries were completed.

Journal writing demands writing skills and in some cases the lack of such skills can inhibit the process. It was fortunate that all participants were eager to express their thoughts in their journals. Sometimes it is possible that the participants might write what they think you would want them to say. Therefore I asked similar questions in different ways on different occasions with the intention of comparing responses to establish consistency. Journaling also takes up a lot of time imposing pressure on participants to complete one entry before the next one was due.

The journal questions are included in Appendix E.

3.7.2. PHOTO VOICE

Photo voice is an interesting method to collect data in qualitative research. It offers a “visual dimension of social life” Warren (2005, p.861). The images become part of the data to be analysed. Photography is one example of visual methodology.

Wagner (1979, p.865) coined the term “native image-making” which refers to participants making “photographs that depict some aspect of their experiences.” The participants in this study were each given a disposable camera and the same photo voice instruction. The participants were required to take photographs that tell their story. Participants in the study responded to the following photo voice instruction as a stimulus for their pictures.

Take 15 photos of the spaces where you believe that you learn and develop your professional practice as a teacher. These spaces may or may not include other people. I will ask you to talk about why you have chosen these particular spaces.

Warren (2005) constantly refers to the “making” rather than the taking of photographs to highlight the fact that the process of capturing the photograph reveals more about the photographer, than the actual image.

Each participant was provided with a disposable camera and the same photo voice question. They were required to capture 10-15 photographs of spaces where they believed they

learnt. All participants, once confident about how to use the camera, embarked on the task quite enthusiastically. Warren (2005, p. 872) claims that photography gives participants a “louder voice via the accessibility of method, control of agenda and ownership of the resulting image.” Researchers favour this method as “participants become assistants in exploring the answers” (*ibid*). In fact the participants appeared to have fun and were not shy about the task. Apart from the need to know how the camera works, this method proved to be very easy to use.

Warren (2005) places emphasis on the ‘immediacy’ that photographs offer. She argues that in the ‘making’ of photographs the photographer is the author. They are documenting their story in the subject of their pictures. These images are given meaning and a ‘social life’ in their interviews where they explain what significance the image holds for them. The interviews in which participants talk about their photographs are known as photo interviews or photo elicitation.

The interesting thing about photo voice is that it entails the participants capturing images and secondly, participants talk about the pictures they took in an interview. In this way they are able to vocalise inherent meaning in their pictures, (Wagner, 1979 and Collier and Collier 1986 cited in Mitchell 2008).

3.7.3. PHOTO ELICITATION

This is the process where the photographs taken are used in the interview as access to “views, perspectives and experiences of participants,” (Mitchell, 2008, p.369). Participants are able to give insight into how they understand their worlds.

In photo elicitation the participants use their images to bring meaning to their conceptions, thus the photographs represent symbols. Collier and Collier (1986 cited in Mitchell 2008) favour this method as they claim that it provides an opportunity for both researcher and participant to explore the photographs together. This study used photo elicitation interviews to allow participants to talk about their photographs.

I used auto-driving as a way of interviewing the participants. This means that the interview was driven by the participants. They discussed photographs explaining why the images were

significant for them. This helps to make their meaning explicit and also eliminates misunderstandings. The interviews were voice recorded with the consent of the participants.

Participants appeared to be comfortable and eager to talk about their images. Their voices brought their personal perspectives to the fore highlighting which learning spaces were significant to them and why. The fact that participants had control over what they wished to photograph enhanced their discussions in the interview. Their views and beliefs emerged on a very personal level with regard to their learning. For example one participant indicated that while she sees the staff room as a site of learning, her liaison is only with those who share her table because she is not comfortable discussing her skills or lack of skills with other teachers. For another participant however the photograph of the same space illustrated her learning by the general interaction with the staff.

While I found this to be a useful method to collect data, there is still scepticism about it being more art than research (Mitchell, 2008). Emmison and Smith (2000 cited in Mitchell 2008) also highlight the issue of “methodological adequacy” that pervades this method. This implies that singly this might not be the most useful way to elicit data. However, they argue that similar questions should be asked about traditional methods as well. They also point out that photographs have the tendency to present a “selective account of reality” (*ibid*). Mitchell (2008) declares that despite the grey areas, this methodology deserves a chance as recent research using visual methodologies has shown. Besides the most important factor should be that photographs acts as a lens through which we see what others ‘see’ and deem important enough to ‘capture’ (Warren, 2003, p.866). Further, the narrative that emanates from the photo elicitation interviews certainly provided rich data about the nature of teacher learning.

3.8. ANALYSING THE DATA

The data were thus in the form of journal entries, photographs and transcripts of photo voice interviews.

After the journals and cameras were handed in to me, I had the photographs developed before setting up a meeting with each of the respondents to conduct the interviews which were based on their respective photographs.

The recorded interviews (permission was sought from each respondent to record their interview) were then transcribed. Using the transcripts and journal entries, I then wrote each respondent's narrative. In the narrative I told the story of the respective teachers' informal learning in their school. The narratives in turn were used to extract how each teacher learnt informally bearing in mind the framework of planned/ unplanned learning and individual/ social learning. Both the interview transcripts and copies of the narratives were given to the respective respondents to verify as a true account of what they said. The information was then plotted on a matrix at the end of each narrative.

The matrix I used is an adaptation of Reid's quadrants of learning (McKinney *et al.* 2005 cited in Fraser *et al.*, 2007, p.160). I modified the matrix to reflect teachers' informal learning within a planned/ unplanned and social/ individual framework. I felt that such a framework would exhibit a clear indication of how teachers engage in informal learning within their working environment. By plotting the information on this matrix I was able to illustrate how and where the teachers engaged in informal learning. It was also possible to read off this matrix how the greater degree of the teachers' development happened informally. Depending on the information in each quadrant the matrix offers insight into each teachers informal learning patterns, for example, engaging in more social learning opportunities or too few individual learning activities, whether the learning teachers access is planned or unplanned. The quadrants in the matrix are made up intersecting continua. Unplanned learning is also referred to as incidental learning and planned learning is also referred to as intentional learning, thus I will indicate as such in brackets in the matrix that follows. In this way I was able to understand to what extent teachers engaged in informal learning at the school. However, it is not always clear exactly where on the continuum of planned and unplanned learning particular types of learning fitted. This is perhaps due to the somewhat shifting nature of both concepts. I therefore tried as far as possible to define their learning in terms of their particular contexts.

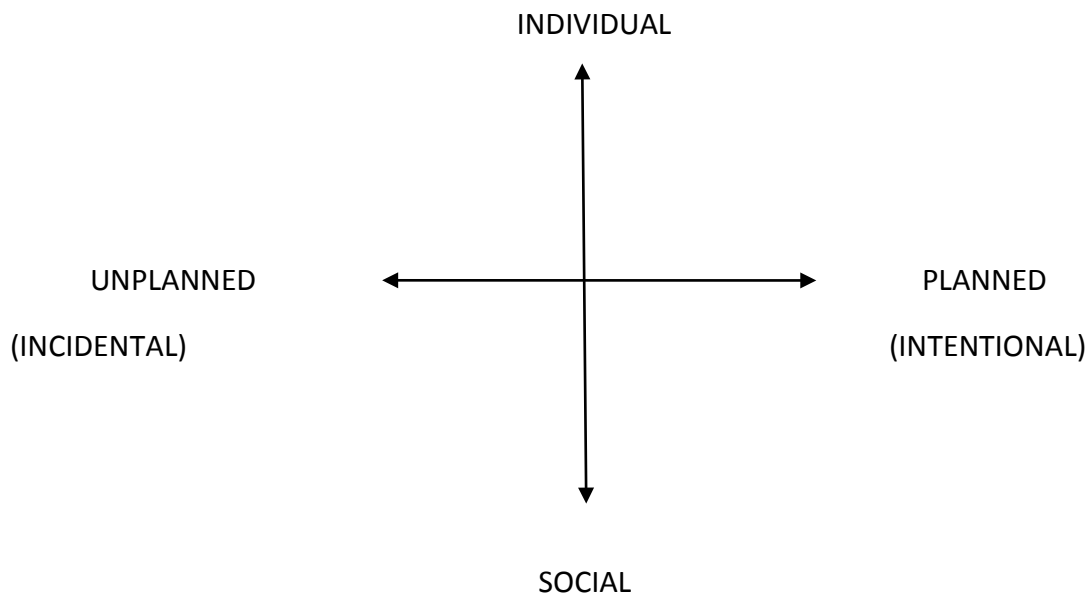


Figure 2: REID'S MODEL ADAPTED TO REFLECT DIMENSIONS OF TEACHERS' INFORMAL LEARNING

Mckinney, 2005 cited in Fraser, 2007

3.9 ETHICAL ISSUES

In terms of ethical considerations, participants were briefed on the nature of the study and what their role in the study entailed. Woods (2006, p.30) highlights that in qualitative research tensions exist “between covert and overt research, the public’s right to know and the subject’s right to privacy.” It is the researcher’s responsibility to adhere to the principles of informed consent. Research is not about invading privacy, getting the scoop at all costs or spying on participants. In fact, it is imperative that the researcher win the trust of the respondents. Soltis (1989 cited in Woods 2006, p.31) attests that there are ‘non negotiable’ values in research. These include “honesty, fairness, respect for persons and beneficence” (ibid). Therefore researchers should strive to ensure that no harm comes to the institution or participants during the research. It is also important to protect the identities of both the institution and respondents. One way of doing this is by using pseudonyms. Further, the researcher must obtain permission to observe record and access documents.

As researcher I first sought ethical clearance via the University for permission to conduct the study. Thereafter, the DoE was contacted for permission to conduct the research with this group of teachers at the school. Then, I sought permission from the principal of the school.

The participants were briefed on the nature of the study. All participants were willing to participate in the study. They were informed that for the next four weeks they would need to keep journals and make weekly entries responding to the tasks set. They were also told that they would be required to take photographs of the spaces in which they learn informally at a later date.

Consent was sought from them to be a part of the study and to voice record the interviews. They were assured of their anonymity and that they could withdraw from the study at any point.

The name of the school will also be withheld. For the purpose of this study the pseudonym ‘Ayodhya High’ would be used. The following pseudonyms will be used for the teachers in the study:

TEACHERS: EXPERIENCED/NOVICE	GENDER	LEARNING AREA+PHASE	YEARS TEACHING EXPERIENCE	PSEUDONYMS
1/ EXPERIENCED	MALE	ACCOUNTING – FET	23	KRSNA
2/EXPERIENCED	FEMALE	TRAVEL AND TOURISM – FET + TECHNOLOGY – GET	26	SHRADDHA
3/EXPERIENCED	FEMALE	AFRIKAANS GET + FET	38	NANDINI
4/NOVICE	FEMALE	ENGLISH - GET + FET	1	RADHA
5/NOVICE	FEMALE	ENGLISH - GET + LIFE ORIENTATION GET	1	YASHODA

Table 3: PSEUDONYMS OF PARTICIPANTS

Informed consent was signed by all participants in the study.

3.10. TRUSTWORTHINESS

Essentially, trustworthiness in qualitative research revolves around providing strong evidence and arguments for the results that emerge from the study. One of the biggest

challenges in qualitative research is establishing trustworthiness. The lack of scientific methods and data make it necessary for alternate criteria to demonstrate the value of the research carried out. Many researchers make use of the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to improve the trustworthiness of their research (Shenton, 2004 and Sinkovics *et. al.* 2008). The criteria that Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose are: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Under the banner of credibility Shenton (2004, p.64) lists fourteen ways to ensure the accurate recording of the phenomena. I will mention only those that are relevant in increasing the trustworthiness of this study:

- The adoption of well established methods. I have used interviews, journaling and photo voice as methods.
- Familiarity with the culture of participating organizations. I am an educator at the school therefore familiar with the culture at the site. According to Woods (2006, p.27) “the less the researcher disturbs the scene, the longer spent in it, and the deeper the penetration of the research, the more the representation of it might be claimed to be authentic.” As an educator at the school I felt that the respondents trusted me therefore were more inclined to be honest in their responses. Further, they expressed interest and enthusiasm in the study. Their testimonies were therefore more likely to be true accounts. Ultimately, the research must be justifiable.
- Triangulation which can involve the use of different methods. Golafshani (2003) also concurs that the use of triangulation enhances trustworthiness. The use of multiple methods enhances depth and accuracy in the study. Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 454) claim that triangulation “serves to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the case is being seen.” I have used different data collection methods.
- Tactics to ensure honesty in informants, for example: opportunity to refuse to participate in the study. The teachers signed an informed consent and were given the option to withdraw from the study at any point.

- Thick description of the phenomenon under study, in this case, teacher learning.
- Examination of previous research findings. The literature review was written after a thorough reading around other similar studies.

With regard to transferability, Shenton (2004) makes it clear that it is virtually impossible to transfer findings to other contexts, people and situations. It is therefore necessary for researchers to provide sufficient contextual information about the fieldwork sites. One can compare instances of the researched phenomenon with their own situations if the researcher provides a thick description.

Dependability is very closely associated with credibility. The process that is followed in the research must be reported on in detail. The following must be included:

- The research design and its implementation.
- The operational detail of the data gathering.
- Reflective appraisal of the project.

Confirmability deals with ensuring the findings are the result of the experiences of the informants. Triangulation strengthens credibility.

To enhance the trustworthiness of this research I used the following procedures. I voice recorded the interviews so that I could go back and verify my transcripts if the data did not make sense. Further, participants verified the interview transcripts and narratives by reading them. This indicates that the transcripts and narratives are a true reflection of what they said.

I also had to ensure that the instruments I used to collect data were suitable for the purpose of this study. Thus I gave the respondents direction in the journal writing by using the same set of questions for all respondents to stimulate thought for their reflections. A similar strategy was used for photo voice with a common photo voice instruction. With regard to the interviews I used the photographs as a tool to engage our discussions. In this way I was able to direct the respondents to the concept of teacher learning.

Triangulation has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying. However, in qualitative research it is difficult for observation or interpretations to be repeated exactly as before.

3.11. LIMITATIONS

The limitation of the study is that the results are not generalisable as the study is confined to a single school. The study was not intended to seek any generalisable results, but rather to attain an indepth understanding of teacher learning particularly informally. Further, the study is only of a group of teachers, not necessarily reflecting the overall ethos of the group or school, let alone other schools.

Another limitation is that I am a researcher and educator at the school, which could have influenced how participants responded.

At the outset, when I briefed the participants on the nature of the study, I also informed them that it was important to gain an honest and true perception of how they learnt. The respondents found the topic rather interesting and appeared to be enthusiastic about exploring their own learning. Thus it appeared to an important individual project for them as it was a group project for me. It is therefore reasonable to assume that their testimonies are honest and truthful.

Being an educator at the school may also have ignited a need for the teachers to support me in my endeavour therefore I feel I might have got better co operation and commitment at this school than I might have at another school. Further, working at the school where research was conducted facilitated making time available at the convenience of both participants and me for necessary meetings.

I do however acknowledge that there might have been a degree of biasness and influence on participants by being researcher and participant at the school. It is possible that respondents would want to say things that would they think I want them to say. They could also assume that I know particular things and not mention important detail in their accounts.

3.12. CONCLUSION

This chapter has given the steps followed in conducting this qualitative study. It outlines how case study methodology was used to answer the research questions in the study. Data was collected from a group of teachers at a secondary school over a period of two months. Multiple data collection methods were used. The chapter highlights the merits of using these methods to collect data relevant to the study. I also give details of the participants and their context. The next chapter will feature the narratives of each of the respondents.

CHAPTER 4

4. TEACHER NARRATIVES OF INFORMAL LEARNING

4.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will present the data in the form of narratives for each of the respondents. The narratives will give an account of how the teachers thought they learnt informally in their workplace. Included in each of the narratives is a matrix that I have adapted from Reid's teacher learning model (*McKinney et al.*, 2005 cited in *Fraser et al.*, 2007). I have used the matrix to plot the respondents informal learning which in turn will show how most of their learning happens at school.

I will compare the narratives to extract similarities and differences among them. These will be used in the discussion chapter.

4.2. NARRATIVE 1: KRSNA

In 1987 Krsna assumed duty for the first time at a high school in Pietermaritzburg. He was appointed there as an Accounting educator. He was qualified to teach both Accounting and Mathematics at secondary level. Due to the needs of the school at the time, he was required to take on a matric class in his first year of teaching.

Over the years as the needs of the school changed, Krsna was moved from one learning area to another, gaining experience in teaching Mathematics, Typing and Library Science. While he was qualified to teach Mathematics and Accounting, he had to learn how to teach the other learning areas on the job. His learning was therefore situated.

He was only confirmed as a permanent educator in his second year of teaching. Fourteen years later he was promoted to Ayodhya High as Head of Department of Commerce. Here he teaches Accounting to grades 10, 11 and 12 learners. He heads a team of nine educators covering subjects like Economics, Business Studies, Accounting and Economics and Management Science.

By Krsna's own admission his first experience in the classroom was a difficult one. In journal entry 1 he wrote, *"I entered the class thoroughly prepared only to have failed dismally in my approach."* He found that being successful in the classroom required more than just preparing a lesson. In his journal he reveals that this initial encounter made it clear that he was lacking in both discipline and methodology skills to be effective in the classroom. It was at this initial stage that he realised that although he was a qualified teacher, he still needed to learn more as the practical experience showed him.

His starting point in acquiring this knowledge was to turn towards his experienced colleagues whom he observed had successful teaching strategies and classroom control. Under their guidance Krsna found that *"I soon became successful in classroom delivery and maintaining discipline."* In this instance Krsna learnt collaboratively from his experienced colleagues, where they shared the knowledge that they had accumulated over the years with him.

In the interview he said that although he entered the profession as a qualified teacher, he felt like he was thrown into the "deep end" and had to learn how to keep afloat. He appeared to find the reality the classroom presented required more of him than he was prepared for in his formal training. To make up for this deficit in his training Krsna turned to his colleague seeking advice on method and discipline strategies. He said in journal entry 1, *"He guided me during the breaks as to what approach I should adopt."* After following the advice of an experienced teacher Krsna found, *"Changing to his strategy proved to be successful."* Krsna shared how adopting the teaching methods and discipline strategies of an experienced teacher helped to instill confidence in his own attempts. It is evident that while Krsna interacted informally with the experienced teachers he was able to access knowledge that he needed in order to improve his practice. The fact that these teachers were willing to share their knowledge allowed Krsna to learn. As this interaction took place in the breaks in a rather informal context, his learning was incidental.

One of the criticisms that Krsna has of the school he was appointed at is that they failed to offer adequate orientation for newly appointed teachers. As a result he felt a little out of his depth. He wrote in journal entry 1, *"I had to find out what was expected of me with regard to administration, example record keeping."* Being in a school for the first time Krsna felt

more comfortable turning to someone he knew from before for assistance in this regard. *“Thankfully, I had known Mr. N from college..... he guided me with what was expected of me.”* Orientation courses are examples of planned social learning programmes. At these courses new teachers are briefed on their expectations and the schools ethos and protocols.

Another example of how orientation could have assisted his development was regarding marking of examination scripts. Krsna was teaching accounting which requires figures being correct and placed in the correct places. Left on his own Krsna *“placed ticks only at correct answers”* (Journal entry 1). It was only after the scripts were moderated that he was told how he should put crosses at incorrect answers. Krsna’s experience highlights the need for orientation and support of teachers who are new in a school. It reveals that it must not be taken for granted that teachers are familiar with all knowledge and skills or the ethos of the school. While Krsna’s learning did not happen as he wanted it to, he did learn by having first made a mistake. Thus this illustrates an example of unplanned or incidental learning.

In journal entry 1 he also shared how the changes in education while he was still fresh in his career resulted in *“anxiety in my (experienced) colleagues and myself”* but as a result of the interaction among colleagues *“confidence built up in me. Working with other teachers strengthened my knowledge.”* In this instance his learning was as a result of collaborating with other teachers. Teachers worked in a community of practice sharing their thoughts and ideas on how to move forward with the resources they had. He explained how they all worked together to unpack the requirements of Outcomes Based Education. He also said that at this point teachers had to network with teachers from other schools to help each other deal with the changes they had to implement in their classrooms.

A new experience confronted Krsna when he was required to teach subjects he was not qualified to teach. These subjects were Library Science and Typing. In this instance he said he worked closely with the Head of Department and peers of the respective learning areas. In journal entry 1 he recounts the experience, *“After receiving the necessary support I entered the resource centre thoroughly prepared.”* This indicates that Krsna felt confident under the guidance of other teachers to take up the challenge although he did not have prior experience. *“With the help of my colleague, I set up the roomshe guided me through the requirements of typing.”* Both these experiences called upon Krsna to learn

from the knowledge of experienced teachers. In this way he was able to become a competent teacher in the subjects he was not qualified to teach. *“Within a month I was totally au fait with the expectations regarding typing and soon started to enjoy it.”* Thus in the fourteen years he spent at the school he gained a lot of experience and knowledge by working collaboratively.

Krsna writes of how his informal interaction with teachers he meets at matric marking sessions and cluster meetings have contributed towards his learning. Teachers in these groups all teach the same subject and at these venues teachers from different schools within the province get to share their experiences and challenges with each other. While the purpose of such teachers coming together is to either mark examination scripts or moderate the work done at school, learning happens as a result of *“informal chats,”* (Journal entry 2). Krsna explained that when teachers come together in this way their conversations invariably direct towards their teaching, challenges and successes in achieving their goals in their classrooms. As a result they end up sharing and borrowing ideas from each other if not supporting those who are struggling. This illustrates an example of teachers learning being unplanned and social in a community.

Krsna found that his interaction with learners in his classroom extend his learning in the sense that they bring to the class different ideas on methods that they pick up from their tutors who teach in other schools. Some learners from Krsna’s Accounting class attend tuition classes after school, conducted by teachers from other schools in the city. He cites an example in journal entry 3 where a learner said, *“He was taught a different method at tuition,”* and Krsna found that he(Krsna) *“increased the knowledge in my data bank”* when the learner enquired about the different method. Interestingly in this way other teachers’ pedagogic knowledge has infiltrated Krsnas’ classroom and extended his own knowledge.

A further example of this learning is evident when learners Krsna tutors (learners not from his school) exposed Krsna to how their teachers applied a rubric to a particular assessment. Previously, Krsna shied away from using rubrics as he explained in journal entry, *“I think it gives a learner a very good idea as to what to submit.”* After viewing how it worked with learners from other schools, he admits, *“I had a change in mindset, realising that it may help to deter copying of assignments.”* It is evident in both these examples that Krsna’s learning

was incidental and unplanned. Krsna has since tried out this method and found that, *“My first attempt proved to be successful and actually made marking easy”* (Journal entry 4).

In journal entry 5 Krsna cites an example of him supporting a teacher in his department, *“We support each other tremendously as a group to the extent of me assisting a colleague by teaching his class so that he can improve his methodology.”* The group he refers to is made up of the teachers in his department at Ayodhya High. Thus Krsna creates a collaborative learning environment for the teachers under his care.

Even up to this point in his career, Krsna acknowledges that he still has things to learn. Apart from networking with teachers from other schools, his colleague, Mr. S, is a source of Krsna’s learning. Mr. S is the deputy principal of Ayodhya High and prior to this he was the Head of the Commerce department for many years. He has trained as a National facilitator for OBE workshops and works closely with the subject advisor, therefore, is very familiar with current issues regarding the subject. Krsna refers to Mr. S as his mentor.

Krsna points out that the network of Accounting teachers in the area forms a strong support base for the teachers in addressing the challenges they face regarding the curriculum or their teaching. Krsna wrote in journal entry 5, *“Many of these educators (in the neighbouring schools) turn to me or Mr. S should they experience any difficulty in this area.”* He also said that *“we exchange ideas and worksheets.”* This community of teachers seems to serve each other well in their development. Krsna therefore learns in communities both within and outside his school.

According to Krsna the key to proficiency in the classroom is being *“thoroughly prepared for my lessons”* (Journal entry 7). Further, he explained, *“I was not afraid to ask for assistance from my colleagues when the need arose.”* This indicates that, firstly Krsna was able to identify his need for development and secondly, he was willing to learn from his colleagues. Krsna reiterates in journal entry 9 that it is important for teachers to *“show a willingness to learn.”* Such learning is possible when teachers are comfortable and trusting with each other.

While Krsna has shared his experiences of learning from and alongside other teachers he also learns individually. His individual learning happens when he *“reads books, surfs the*

internet or extracts information from policy documents” (Journal entry 7). Such learning is self directed.

At this school Krsna has learnt how to implement a discipline strategy using demerits. In journal entry 3 he shares how this strategy has helped him maintain discipline especially with relief classes which usually tend to be noisy, *“Learners tend to be noisy during relief. I learnt how to maintain lower levels of noise.”*

4.3. PHOTOGRAPHS

Krsna captured some photographs of spaces where he learns informally. One of his photographs is of a television. In particular Krsna has found “The Learning Channel” to be useful in his professional development. The programme is designed to offer live, interactive lessons for matriculants. Learners can call in with particular questions that the teacher would help them answer. He said in the interview, *“It helped in terms of difficult methods of teaching a certain aspect and in that aspect I grew.”* He also said that the news offered *“information relevant”* to his teaching. For example he has learnt how to use the current information available on this channel to help his learners make comparisons relating to interest rates, fixed deposit rates and stock markets.

Using a photograph depicting some of the learners Krsna teaches, he explained in the photovoice interview that he sees his learners as a source of his own learning. By virtue of their different interpretations of his lessons they are able to alert him to different ideas. In the photo voice interview he said, *“You’ll get a learner raising his hand, saying to you, ‘Sir, can we not do it this way?’ and you will find that it is absolutely correct.”* From Krsna’s experience he has found that even from marking their work he is able to learn from their different interpretations.

He also photographed learners at his tuition class. Krsna tutors learners from other schools in Pietermaritzburg in the afternoons. From his interaction with these learners he found that he is able to pick up methodologies that their teachers use which differ from his. He admits, *“Sometimes I also learn a bit of content from them.”*



Figure 3: PHOTOGRAPH 3: RESOURCE MATERIAL IN KRSNA'S OFFICE

Photograph 3 shows his resource material. Krsna has over the years accumulated a lot of resource material. As HoD he keeps files of information related to his subject per grade. Much of this information includes what he has learnt over the years. In the interview he explained, *“It (files) contain all the information I accumulated.”* Apart from documenting what he has learnt in terms of teaching his subject it also contains *“CASS requirements”* for his learning area. He said that these files also include *“tons of question papers and worksheets broken down into different grades.”* By making these available to other teachers he is sharing his learning with others. Teachers in his team have the option of combining his ideas with theirs and possibly emerging with new learning and ideas.

In the photo voice interview Krsna elaborated on how the community of Accounting teachers network quite informally with each other:

If there is a discrepancy with a particular question, because this comes up quite often where my interpretation varies from others, by discussing it via the phone (with teachers from other schools or areas) you get different interpretations and it all comes into place eventually.

It seems that the teachers in this community support each other and are easily accessible to help.

As the neighbouring schools are within close proximity of Ayodhya High, teachers from other schools often call here to meet with teachers (for academic, co curricular or extra mural activities) or borrow resources. Such interaction lends itself for opportunities to learn from each other. Krsna recalled in the interview how interaction with Accounting teachers even takes place in the school car park. He explained, *“We talk about things that are troubling us in the curriculum and the problems in the material sent to us by the DOE and how we can put that right.”* This illustrates that the teachers are able to share their ideas and work towards solutions together thus learn socially.

Krsna claims that the DOE is inefficient in supporting the Accounting teachers and in providing clear instructions. He wrote in journal entry 2 how this leads to the teachers having to work with each other in order to build competence, *“.... the facilitator (from the DoE workshops) 95% of the time does not know what’s happening.”* He used a challenge regarding assessments as an example of how they were left to deal with an important issue on their own although they requested assistance from the DOE. Krsna said, *“While we were given the literature on what these assessments are we were not given tangible evidence as to how they should be used.”* The teachers dealt with the problem in the following way, *“By discussing it with our colleagues we came to some common ground on what a report should be.”* Once again Krsna highlights the merits of teachers working collaboratively.

He also explained in the photo voice interview that it is useful to chat to teachers from other schools because it helps to bring teachers to the realisation that perhaps:

Our school tends to go overboard and in going overboard, we do too much, putting a strain on the learner. So when you speak to others you realise you shouldn’t be doing that. This is what is expected and this is what you should do.

Networking in this instance helped Krsna to determine to what extent he is doing too much or perhaps too little. By teachers sharing their strategies and experiences Krsna was able to see that there are simpler ways of delivering the curriculum without burdening his learners and still meeting the objectives of the curriculum. The benefits of learning socially are

evident in the communication these teachers share which helps to support, guide and encourage teachers to deal with a seemingly difficult curriculum.

Krsna feels that reflection is important. He said in the interview:

I generally do this (reflect) when I have learners asking me a question about an aspect I have just taught. It means they did not understand the way it came across and I would reflect on it and think of an alternate strategy to explain the same thing. Reflection has to be done.

He explained that his learning doesn't only come from teachers in his own learning area. Learning areas are linked or integrated, therefore it is possible that an Accounting teacher can chat to a Social Science teacher about how demographics impacts on consumer spending. This exchange of information can help teachers learn how to integrate their information when teaching their learners. He said such interaction can take place easily, even in the corridors of the school building. He referred to this as "*corridor talks*" in journal entry 1.

Reading played an important role in Krsna's finding his way through the curriculum, especially, "*because of the changes to the curriculum,*" (Journal entry 1). He also said in the interview :

A lot of the subject matter which I had to learn came from reading which I had accumulated through various sources also from advisory whenever I need to know something, I read through it, I look at it, make sense of it and apply it.

He also said that with regard to documentation like policies from the DOE it has "*information not properly explained in the document. We (as management) got to read, understand and analyse it ourselves.*"

Below, I have plotted Krsna's informal learning on a matrix. The matrix reveals that most of his learning happens socially and there appears to be as many planned opportunities as there are unplanned ones.

4.3.1

KRSNA'S INFORMAL LEARNING

INDIVIDUAL

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading policy documents, newspapers, books, internet – learnt content and pedagogic knowledge.. • Researching content on the internet. • Watching tv- learnt from information in current affairs and news programmes. • Trial and error- find teaching methods that suit him best. • Listening to learners interpretation and ideas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection – assess what to change in his teaching. • Mentoring- shares learning with teachers in his department.
<p>UNPLANNED (incidental)</p>	<p>PLANNED (intentional)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chatting in formally with teachers visiting the school in the car park. • Interacting with colleagues- sharing content and pedagogic knowledge. • Networking with teachers from other schools- sharing ideas and information. • Exchanging ideas with colleagues – corridor chats. Liaising with other teachers – learnt how to interpret particular questions. • Interacting with learners during tuition classes- picked up strategies other teachers used from learners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attending cluster meetings- share experiences and ideas. • Conversing informally with teachers he meets at workshops. • Sharing knowledge of different techniques and strategies at matric marking sessions. • Interacting in subject committee meetings- bringing different ideas together, tackling challenges, planning. • Engaging in management meetings- learnt leadership strategies, interpreting policy documents.
<p>SOCIAL</p>	

Figure 4: MATRIX OF KRSNA'S INFORMAL LEARNING

Adapted from Reid's model in Mckinney, 2005 cited in Fraser, 2007

4.3.2. SUMMARY OF KRSNA'S INFORMAL LEARNING

Krsna's informal learning started from the very day he stepped into the classroom for the first time. His learning happened as a result of his interaction with colleagues and guidance from his HOD. He was able to translate into new learning areas with the help of his colleagues and successfully teach two subjects he was not trained to teach.

He described how the teachers in the area form a community of Accounting teachers. This community is instrumental in providing a forum for discussion where various interpretations are discussed and it also assists teachers in tackling misconceptions and coming to common agreement about how they would teach particular aspects of the syllabus. It has also guided them in how to implement assessment criteria. Teachers display the productivity of learning in a social environment.

The community of teachers stem from their meeting at various gatherings like workshops, marking centres and cluster meetings thus their contact is not confined to the town. They maintain contact via telephone and email if they cannot meet personally.

Krsna also showed us how he is able to pick up other teachers' techniques by interacting with learners who attend other schools and join him for tuition. Similarly, his learners who attend tuition with tutors from other schools also bring their tutors' ideas with them, creating an opportunity for Krsna to learn. It is also possible that these learners also carry Krsna's ideas to other teachers in a similar way.

His learning also happens individually. Krsna accesses information as and when he requires it using the various resources at his disposal.

Krsna is a member of management but acknowledges that he would continue to learn for as long as he is in the profession. His experience as a novice made him aware of the need for new teachers to be orientated into the school and profession. Thus, in his role as HOD he makes the effort to mentor the teachers under his care. While mentoring he is exposed to current or fresh ideas that these teachers bring with them allowing this to be a learning opportunity for him as well.

4.4. NARRATIVE 2: NANDINI

Nandini has been teaching for 38 years, starting her career in the 1970's. She is qualified to teach both Afrikaans and English, but has spent most of her years in the profession teaching Afrikaans. Her first teaching experience was at a secondary school in Pietermaritzburg where she taught Afrikaans for 36 years.

In her journal she speaks about how challenging it was to teach learners the *"language of the oppressor"* in those early years of her career. She wrote in journal entry 1, *"It (Afrikaans) was widely known as the language of the oppressor, so that dimension had to be taken into account. The learners had a tremendous dislike for the language."*

A few years back she resigned from teaching in South Africa and explored teaching in Dubai, in search of greener pastures. She spent one academic year in Dubai teaching English. On her return to South Africa, two years ago, she was appointed as a governing body educator at Ayodhya High to teach Afrikaans. Although she enjoyed the experience in Dubai and will return at the drop of a hat, her personal commitments deny her that opportunity.

Currently, she teaches Afrikaans to grades 8, 9 and 11 learners. Since this is an English medium school, Afrikaans is taught as a second language or what is now known as The First Additional Language. The majority of learners opting to study Afrikaans are Indian, while most Black learners choose isiZulu as their second language of study. Learners at this school have very limited exposure to Afrikaans in its written and spoken form as the language does not infiltrate their homes. Nandini's testimony will elaborate on this challenge later on.

She places a lot of emphasis on being prepared to teach. She strongly believes that part of her preparedness includes planning. There is reference in the data to planning at both cluster meetings and internally at subject committee meetings. *"The implementation (of the syllabus) requires careful planning in order to impart the knowledge to the learners in an effective way."* It is interesting to note that a teacher with such experience can have such an open mind to the way that she practices now. This means that she does not use her experience to mean that she knows everything about how to teach. In the data she also refers to her current participation in planning strategies with her colleagues in subject committee meetings. She is therefore learning collaboratively with and from her colleagues.

In journal entry 2 she writes, “...teachers are required to examine the syllabus with the subject committees and work out ways of designing lesson plans in a smart and meaningful way.” This indicates that Nandini feels teachers should work collaboratively or in a team. She doesn’t however, say why working in this way is useful, but it is evident that she is comfortable working with others. She makes constant reference to working with others in order to prepare for the lesson. She speaks frequently of accessing different methodologies to improve her effectiveness in the classroom. In journal entry 1 she wrote, “I was able to communicate with teachers from other schools in regard to preparation, methods of teaching, testing and remediation.” Then in journal entry 6 she said, “I had to communicate with colleagues on teaching methods.” She also gets ideas about what methods to use from her learners. She said in the interview, “I asked them, ‘how you would prefer to learn?’ and they said, ‘try this method’.” By consulting teachers outside school she is extending her learning outside the confines of her school. Thus her learning is situated both in and out of school.

Further evidence of her reliance on planning and working in a community appears in journal entry 2 when she wrote that clusters help teachers to “fine tune their teaching plan which reduces their workload with regard to preparation and setting of exam papers.” The cluster is made up of Afrikaans teachers within the area and these meetings allow them to bring their concerns and seek assistance from each other, while they map their way forward for the academic year. These cluster meetings are planned meetings that offer teachers a support mechanism to deal with the challenges that they are encountering during the course of the year. It also demonstrates how teachers in a community exemplify teachers learning socially.

She is very mindful of her purpose and intention in the classroom. She feels that the purpose of her learning is to get “fresh ideas, interesting methods, smart testing so that teachers and learners can work towards a common goal, that is, the learner reaching his full potential.” Thus she seeks both content and pedagogic knowledge in her development. Her pursuit of this knowledge sees her engage in both individual and social learning.

In journal entry 2 Nandini reveals how communities of teachers have been a source of support for her. She speaks of teacher forums and orientation courses where teachers

gather. She sees such gatherings as an opportunity to seek solutions to problems. She elaborated that teachers share problems, talk about them and thus learn from others. Further in journal entry 5, she said that working in a community and collaboratively helps her with different ideas in interpreting the syllabus and getting smarter methods of teaching and assessment.

Speaking of her collegial relationship with her peers on site, Nandini describes them as very helpful indeed:

They wouldn't just talk to you, they will give you information – example, if you made a mistake with a certain language structure, then they would give you a good few examples to reinforce it (Photo voice interview)

In this way she felt encouraged and supported.

She sees her colleagues on site as her “immediate source of learning because we exchange ideas (Interview). Nandini explained that she finds the experience of working in this way “*extremely enriching.*” It seems that the immediacy of such contact makes help and support easily accessible to teachers on site. As Nandini says, all it entails is “*a little message across – either verbal or a little note ...there's constant communication.*”

Some of the things that Nandini lists as having learnt from collaborating with other teachers are: “*different ideas in interpreting the syllabus, smarter methods of teaching and assessment strategies*” (Journal entry 5). In journal entry 6 she also describes how she learnt how to administer a listening comprehension test by observing other teachers.

The idea of learning from and alongside other teachers, started early in Nandini's career. Faced with teaching a second language and its negative political connotations, Nandini admits that accessing suitable content for their learners was priority. In journal entry 1 she makes reference to how after qualifying as a teacher she found it necessary to work with “*seasoned teachers.*” She wrote, “*I found that constant communication with seasoned teachers on vocabulary building and the mastery of sentence construction absolutely essential.*” She explained that such communication helped her with “*preparation, methods of teaching, testing and remediation.*” Currently she still finds it very useful to keep in touch

with other educators both in her school at in other schools to exchange views and thoughts on how they teach particular sections of the syllabus.

This example illustrates her learning with the support of experienced teachers. Teachers working together in this way, that is collaboratively, form a community where they can share ideas, information and problems and in this way learn from each other.

With regard to networking, apart from the teachers in her immediate context, she also used other opportunities to extend her liaison with teachers. Some of these opportunities include cluster meetings, orientation courses, and co curricular activities. These are examples of planned learning opportunities. In journal entry 1 Nandini said that by teachers collaborating in this way they were *“able to improve on the following skills: research techniques, interpretation skills and how to encourage critical thinking.”*

Another example of learning in a community is addressed in her journal when she wrote, *“In order to make the best of a bad situation teachers across the country had to unite in their endeavour to get learners to make progress in this language.”* (Journal entry 1) She discussed in her journal how they worked together by sharing their ideas to advance toward a common goal i.e. *“Improve learner performance”*, rather than sit back and accept that apartheid was denying their learners the opportunity to learn.

The fact that she says that they had to *“unite”* emphasises the sense of camaraderie these teachers felt and the value of this community to their development as Afrikaans teachers in *“Indian schools.”*

Because of the open door policy she feels with her colleagues she can even share with them on a personal level. For personal piece of advice, *“I know I can go to anyone from staff, be it man or woman, - and it’s comfortable for me – it’s easy for me and I don’t have any kind of reservation”* (Photo voice interview).

Apart from planning in meetings with colleagues she does her own planning starting with the syllabus set out by the Department of Education. She explains that her guidance regarding objectives, content, assessment criteria and assessment tasks come from the syllabus (Journal entry 2).

It was also evident in the data that Nandini spends a lot of time seeking content that is suitable for her particular learners but not available from the DoE. In the interview she discussed the value of resources depicted in the photographs to her development.

This quest to use material that is current and relevant has seen this teacher transform quite easily into a teacher of the twenty first century. This draws my attention to the emphasis she places on accessing content for her subject. She is not reliant on textbooks. In fact she speaks passionately of using as many resources as are at her disposal to get relevant and suitable material to use in her classroom. This is an example of individual learning where Nandini tries to find resourceful ways of bringing the language to her learners.

This is not a new attitude that she has adopted. She mentions how in the 70's despite the political turmoil, she was able to use the medium of television to gather useful material. She makes reference to *the "news, actuality programmes, lifestyle programmes, advertisements and sport programmes"* to help second language learners improve their *"pronunciation and vocabulary."* Nandini was also able to extend her own knowledge incidentally by picking up vocabulary that she was not familiar with. She used this knowledge to teach her learners writing and oral skills.

4.5. PHOTOGRAPHS

The photographs below were taken by Nandini to illustrate her informal learning:



Figure 5: PHOTOGRAPH 1: TELEVISION SET

PHOTOGRAPH 1 is of the television. In the interview she claimed that the television is her main source of learning. She explained that this medium helps her stay in touch with the changes that seem to take place with the language, *“The language is changing all the time and new ideas are coming through in terms of language. This kind of medium now lends itself to better development.”* In fact she complains that since 1994 her access to sufficient programming has been reduced. She said in the interview, *“in fact when apartheid fell down in 1994, strange but true, it had a terrible disadvantage in terms of what we had to learn for our subject...Afrikaans had a small slot.”* She reiterated that such programmes were useful to her as it helped learners with pronunciation and vocabulary building and consequently saw an improvement in their written work. She felt that learners needed this exposure as they do not hear any of it at home. Thus, Nandini has learnt that the way to improve her learners’ performance in the second language is to find ways to expose them to what the language sounds like.



Figure 6: PHOTOGRAPH 2: DVD PLAYER

Photograph 2 is of a DVD player. Nandini explained in the interview how she found DVDs of Afrikaans stories for little children very useful to her teaching in the high school. They learn Afrikaans as their second language and they have very little exposure to how the language is spoken. As a result their vocabulary is very limited. Nandini uses these children's stories to extract vocabulary that would be useful for learners. She says of the DVDs "*... the vocab was so rich although it's for junior kids – I was able to pick up so many wonderful things from the little stories.*" She uses this resource to access suitable content for her learners. She has learnt that while these stories are for younger first language children, they can be used for her older second language learners to extend their vocabulary.



Figure 7: PHOTOGRAPH 3: NANDINI'S COMPUTER

In **PHOTOGRAPH 3** Nandini captured a picture of her computer. Nandini was very excited about having access to 'Google' in Afrikaans. She said, *"All you have to do is punch in what you need! It comes up with a whole lot of exercises and answers. So that is why, that is something absolutely indispensable."* In journal entry 1, she wrote about the computer, *"What a great source of information to enhance learning and make teaching and learning fun."* She illustrates another useful way to use the internet in journal entry 2 – she wrote of viewing lessons on the internet to learn how to teach report writing. It is therefore clear that the computer and the internet aid Nandini in seeking both content and pedagogic knowledge. Her perspective on the usefulness of this resource is evident in her thoughts in journal entry 2, *"This meeting of minds (internet, email, facebook) and exchange of information is beginning to play a major role in the life of a teacher."*



Figure 8: PHOTOGRAPH 4: RADIO

PHOTOGRAPH 4 shows the radio. Nandini, due to her experience, advises that this medium offers teachers an invaluable opportunity to learn. She said in the interview, *“If any teacher wants to develop language – that is the where one has to go. The pronunciation is excellent, the quality of the language is tops ...even the music programmes lend themselves to learning.”* She insists that, *“it’s absolutely enriching to me and to the child, for example, the other day I picked up “go-getter”. We don’t find that in the dictionary – but I picked it up in a programme.”* Further, bearing in mind that these children are not exposed to how this language is spoken, at home it is understandable how listening to Afrikaans programmes can help the child with pronunciation and language usage.



Figure 9: PHOTOGRAPH 5: PRINT MEDIA

PHOTOGRAPH 5 captured the print media. Nandini uses these to help her learners develop writing skill. She said in the interview, *“I was able to get every single word the child required. They are up to date with the language.”* She finds this medium important because she can access vocabulary on current issues. Thus she uses these resources extensively to teach the aspect of formal writing.

Nandini has learnt that as a teacher she has to be very innovative in how she brings this ‘foreign’ language to these learners such that they are able to cope with the demanding written and oral assessments of it. She has realised that the textbooks are not sufficient in their content for her learners; therefore she has learnt to resort to a variety of resources to help the learners in this school cope with learning the language. It is her strategy to get them to listen to and read the language as written and spoken by first language speakers so that learners can pick up the rules of the language she teaches them.

In terms of her need for pedagogic knowledge she does a lot of reading around classroom management. In journal entry 3 she said that she copes with classroom management by *“studying modern texts”* and in journal entry 6 she wrote about finding creative discipline

strategies, *“by reading texts on creative discipline where teachers entered into negotiation with the learner rather than operating on a ‘I’m the boss’ level.”*

From the above it is evident that Nandini spends a lot of time learning individually with resources. She makes us realise that learning in this way empowers her to be more competent in the classroom. Despite the years of experience she has, she still admits a need for ongoing learning.

Nandini is not afraid to seek the information or whatever else she needs to learn. Despite her experience she found herself needing to learn how to teach a new aspect (report writing). While she could have turned to her colleagues, she chose to turn to reading up on it and *“viewing lessons on the net”* (Journal entry 3).

In journal entry 6 she wrote, *“I had to research texts and communicate with colleagues on teaching methods. I also studied memoranda of previous tests.”* We can see that Nandini does not only rely on any one way of learning. She engages in both social and individual learning. She also shows great enthusiasm and initiative to learn.

Learners also form an essential source of Nandini’s learning. She sees learners as a key indicator to what she should do in the classroom. In photograph 1 she captured the learners in the corridor. In the photo voice interview she explained that they are the *“main sources of learning because they are able to tell you whether you are using the right method, that they are receiving it well and they are also able to point out perhaps something that you didn’t think of to try out in the classroom.”* In journal entry 7 she wrote, *“learners must be able to feel comfortable with the teacher, trust the teacher.”* This highlights her belief that the relationship between teacher and learner must be cordial.

She pays very close attention to what learners think by constantly asking for feedback on how she presents the lessons to them. In the interview she spoke about how during the difficult times of apartheid which made teaching Afrikaans much more difficult, the students brought it to her attention that they couldn’t learn from the method she was using to teach. She then asked them for suggestions. After adapting her method to their suggestions she found that they were more receptive to learning. She said in the interview, *“I find their whole attitude changes- they become so engaged – so close to you.”*

In fact Nandini takes her learners suggestions so seriously that she even took them to workshops for review by other teachers. In journal entry 1 she wrote, *“Their ideas were extremely helpful when teachers were involved in discussions at workshops as their (learners) input were raised for consideration.”* Here we note how Nandini has taken what she learnt incidentally from her learners to a formal learning programme.

Nandini does not forget her role in her learning. She is one of those teachers who is always assessing what she does in the classroom, i.e. she reflects on her teaching. In the interview she said, *“It’s actually every day – Can I do this differently – what if I try this method? Will they take to that?”*

Her experience and reflection have revealed the following reasons for learners’ lack of understanding in her lessons as documented in journal entry 2:

Teacher’s pace is too fast.

Learners did not understand the teacher’s explanation.

Learners fail to attempt homework exercise for consolidation.

Too many assessment tasks for them (learners).

Nandini explained that she uses this knowledge to adapt how she functions as a teacher. By seeking strategies from other teachers on how to encourage learners to attempt homework, asking learners the method they prefer to be taught in and adjusting the pace of her lessons to suit her learners, Nandini has learnt to deal with the challenges differently. She has developed new methodology and discipline strategies.

One would think that someone with such experience should be teaching others rather than learning from others. But she said in the interview, *“with my length in service I’ve come to realise that every single person is a source of learning and they are absolutely enriching for teachers.”* In journal entry 4 she wrote that she looks forward to learning from younger teachers because they have fresh ideas. Hence, she is a teacher committed to life long learning.

Nandini also keeps in touch with her former colleagues, some of whom have since retired, via email. Despite them not being in the profession anymore she finds that she can still exchange information that is relevant to her teaching and development with them.

It is also interesting that Nandini fondly and somewhat gratefully recalls the supervisory visits made by subject advisors to teachers' classrooms in the early days of her career. She saw her subject advisor as a valuable form of support. In journal entry 2, she wrote *"This official plays a vital role in teacher learning as he/she is in the best position to provide guidance in all areas of the syllabus."* Further, in journal entry 7 she documented, *"annual evaluations were conducted and the young teacher was given a rating from satisfactory to outstanding. This enabled the teacher to grow from strength to strength."*

While Nandini's development has revolved around learning informally, she also values formal learning programmes like workshops.

In plotting Nandini's informal learning on the matrix, it was apparent that there was emphasis on individual learning in an unplanned or incidental manner. In fact her planned or intentional learning was minimal in comparison to the learning indicated in the other quadrants. Further, her planned learning happened in a more interactive or social way than individually.

4.5.1 NANDINI'S INFORMAL LEARNING

Adapted from Reid's model in Mckinney, 2005 cited in Fraser, 2007

INDIVIDUAL

- Receiving feedback from learners- learning how to readjust lessons.
- Unpacked guidelines set in syllabus.
- Watching television – tune in to sound of language.
- Listened to radio – learnt pronunciation of words.
- Reading magazines, newspapers- Learnt vocabulary for particular themes.
- Surfing the internet- Google Available in Afrikaans.
- Emailing friends- share content, clarify issues, address challenges.
- Analyse past year papers- learnt how to phrase questions.
- Peruse memoranda – learnt how to direct learners in terms of examiners expectations – what is acceptable practice.
- Using resources as support material- DVDs, CDs.

- Attending orientation courses.
- Listening to advice from subject advisors.

UNPLANNED(incidental)

- Networking with teachers from other schools.
- Interacting with peers. Emailing teachers – sharing.
- Telephoning teachers- clarify issues.
- Planning for the year with other teachers

PLANNED(intentional)

- Attending :
- Cluster meetings
 - Subject committee meetings
 - Workshops
 - Teacher forums

SOCIAL

4.5.2. SUMMARY OF NANDINI'S INFORMAL LEARNING

The data shows that Nandini engages in learning both individually and socially. However, there is much more evidence of her learning individually. While that may be so, her learning in a community is also important to her as it provides a pillar of support by uniting the teachers of this particular learning area. In this way they share not just content but work together on challenges as well. She liaises with teachers both on and off site. They don't feel like they are alone in this rather challenging learning area.

She has repeatedly pointed out that the learners don't have a favourable attitude towards this language because it still has an association with the painful past and the fact that it is not spoken in the homes of their families.

Nandini spends a lot of time planning and seeking content relevant to what she has to teach. Her aim is to make the language enjoyable and instil confidence in her learners.

She uses a variety of resources namely, DVDs, CDs, television programmes, radio programmes to help her make the language accessible to her learners. She does not discount the value of learning in formal programmes. She claims that the resources also expose her to changes that have taken place in the language. Further she uses them to try to make the language less daunting for her learners. The more exposure they get the better they understand.

She places emphasis on planning both in her individual capacity and together with her colleagues. She doesn't speak of sharing content as much as she speaks of addressing how they would teach and what they would teach.

She displays an open mind to mentoring. She also shows that she is a versatile teacher- always looking for new methods. She is by no means rigid in her ways. She is open to change even to the extent of accommodating learners ideas in her teaching.

4.6. NARRATIVE 3: SHRADDHA

Shraddha started her career 31 years ago. She first qualified as an English and Afrikaans high school teacher. However she was placed in a primary school where she taught both these subjects for five years. Thereafter when the Department of Education realised that she was placed in a primary school rather than a high school, she was moved to a high school where she continued to teach English and Afrikaans. During the fifteen years she spent here she pursued a degree majoring in Geography. She wrote in her journal *“I felt that I had already learnt what I needed to know concerning the languages and I decided to get a degree in Geography and Psychology.”*

After spending 20 years in the profession, she left to embark on a business venture with the intention of returning to the profession later. In the photo voice interview she explains her decision to leave:

I did that for one sole reason.... I felt that with what I was earning – wasn't sufficient for what I wanted to do- I wanted to travel – so I started my own business- travelled and travelled to as many countries as I could because I knew that I would come back to teaching...

Five years later she re entered the profession only to find herself having to teach two brand new learning areas: Technology and Tourism. She was neither trained nor qualified to teach either of them. Shraddha explained in the photo voice interview how she came to find herself in this unique situation:

When I walked into this school ... the principal and deputy principal told me that we don't have a subject for you to teach that you are qualified in but we still want you to come – we can offer these two subjects that you don't have experience in...

And so began a new chapter in the life of this teacher who was already qualified to teach three other subjects, embarking on a journey teaching TWO new subjects she is not qualified to teach. Further, after 20 odd years experience in the profession she was starting over as a novice in these new subjects.

To take this challenge on Shraddha had to start over by learning from others. She states that much of her learning involved learning from other teachers in the school but mostly from her head of department in Technology – *“In Technology my HoD was experienced and I had to learn from him, practice at home and teach it the next day”* (Journal entry 3). Her learning therefore happened collaboratively. Being novice in these subjects she had a great need to learn content knowledge. Thus, she sought planned intervention from her peers and her HoD, however, her learning was informal in that their interaction was informal rather than in a structured meeting.

In Technology Shraddha was highly dependent on learning her content knowledge from both HOD and peers. She therefore had on site support and learning. She also found that she needed to do more than this to learn, therefore *“I also used textbooks and read whatever I could.”* Thus her learning was both social and individual. Also, she enrolled for a course in Technology to supplement the learning she had so far gained informally.

With regard to Tourism she was faced with a greater challenge as she was the only educator teaching the subject in the school. She therefore had to seek assistance from teachers in other schools. She recorded in her journal entry 3 *“I had to network with teachers from other schools.”* Here we see that Shraddha’s learning was influenced by collaboration with other teachers outside her own school. She also makes it clear that learning in this way was necessary for her to develop in these learning areas.

Shraddha shows no qualms about consulting with teachers in other schools. In fact, it appears that Tourism teachers in particular, have established an active community of teachers constantly sharing ideas and seeking clarity from each other. It is evident here that Shraddha’s learning does take place socially in a community of Tourism teachers.

Shraddha’s description of this community, which seems to have emerged from their contacts in both the marking centres and cluster meetings appears to provide much needed support for teachers of this fairly new subject in ex- HoD schools. Shraddha admits in the photo voice interview:

By networking with all the other people you find out where we went wrong and what we should have done. It helped me a lot in that way because there are ways in which

other people do things that are sometimes much better than what I do, example, the way they do their portfolios...

From this it is evident that apart from Shraddha seeking content knowledge, she also gains pedagogic knowledge in this community.

The school at which Shraddha teaches encourages teachers to work collaboratively. Here she works closely with her HoD and peers. She found that she had to first learn content from them, practice it at home, before trying to teach it to her learners. She declares that with this particular subject (Technology) it was rather challenging as she does not have a maths background, which is a prerequisite for such a subject. However, with the support of her HoD and peers she felt that she was able to successfully transform into a Technology teacher. Her experience highlights the need for onsite support in teacher learning. In journal entry 5 she recorded:

He (HoD) showed me how to do drawings and guided me through the Technology syllabus. He even guided me with regard to assessments. Mr. T is also part of our group and we share knowledge.

Another example of working as a team was evident in the moments of planning that happen at subject committee meetings and cluster meetings. Shraddha found these meetings useful in how she planned her teaching strategies and sequenced her lessons. She shows that she is comfortable learning in a community of teachers. One of the benefits she claims in the photo voice interview of working in such a community is gaining insight into how to deal with challenges. She cites an example of how this forum helped her with a Practical Assessment Task (PAT) component of Tourism which she initially found too daunting. A fellow colleague from a neighbouring school discussed at a cluster meeting how she designed a method that made her work easier. Other teachers found her idea most rewarding and all teachers are now using that method. The whole idea of sharing and being supportive keeps the community of teachers functional and alive. Shraddha said in the photo voice interview:

Even though we are at a workshop, we talk among ourselves and don't go empty handed – whenever we have meetings, even cluster meetings, each of us goes with something that we

prepared during the course of the year. We leave the box there and find that educators – especially the young ones come in.

From this example we can see that these teachers attach a lot of value to working in a community or learning socially. They learn with and from each other developing their different knowledges (content, pedagogic and pedagogic content).

Shraddha explained in the photo voice interview that the liaison with these teachers extends beyond their meetings. They are in constant contact telephonically, by email etc. regarding their subject matter. They share assistance with both content and pedagogic knowledge. An example of this was when she was confronted with a new section to teach. She recalled in the interview:

A section on Time Zones and Car Hire was new to me.... it has a complex section involving calculations which learners find difficult to comprehend. Mrs. P helped me here. I made an appointment with her after school.... Her experience in Tourism and the teaching of the above helped me tremendously.

Once again Shraddha's learning involves interaction/ collaboration with another teacher. This time she seeks guidance from a more experienced teacher in the field. Her initiative to learn displays her self motivation or willingness to learn. Here we see how she took the initiative to plan a meeting with someone who could help her learn.

The teachers that form this group illustrate that a sense of community is necessary to support teachers in their jobs. Shraddha even exchanges information with a Tourism teacher in the Eastern Cape and receives information about content from her son abroad. Speaking about how the teachers in this community have helped her develop as a competent tourism teacher, Shraddha wrote in her journal entry 5, *"In addition they have provided support for all problems relating to this subject. I owe them an awful lot of thanks as they have contributed to my development in Tourism."*

Shraddha also attaches a lot of value to resources in her teaching, especially with regard to Tourism. Photographs 2, 5, 6 & 7 depict the various resources that help her stay abreast

with the content, keep in touch with other educators and indicate the support she receives from the Department of Education in terms of resource material.

She admits that the nature of a subject like Tourism is such that the teacher needs to be well informed about what is happening in the world. She explained in the photo voice interview:

We deal with a lot of currencies and politics – political situations in different countries so we have to be in constant contact with the media....everyday the currencies change – we have to put the currencies up on the board.

4.7. PHOTOGRAPHS

Shraddha took the following photographs to document her informal learning:

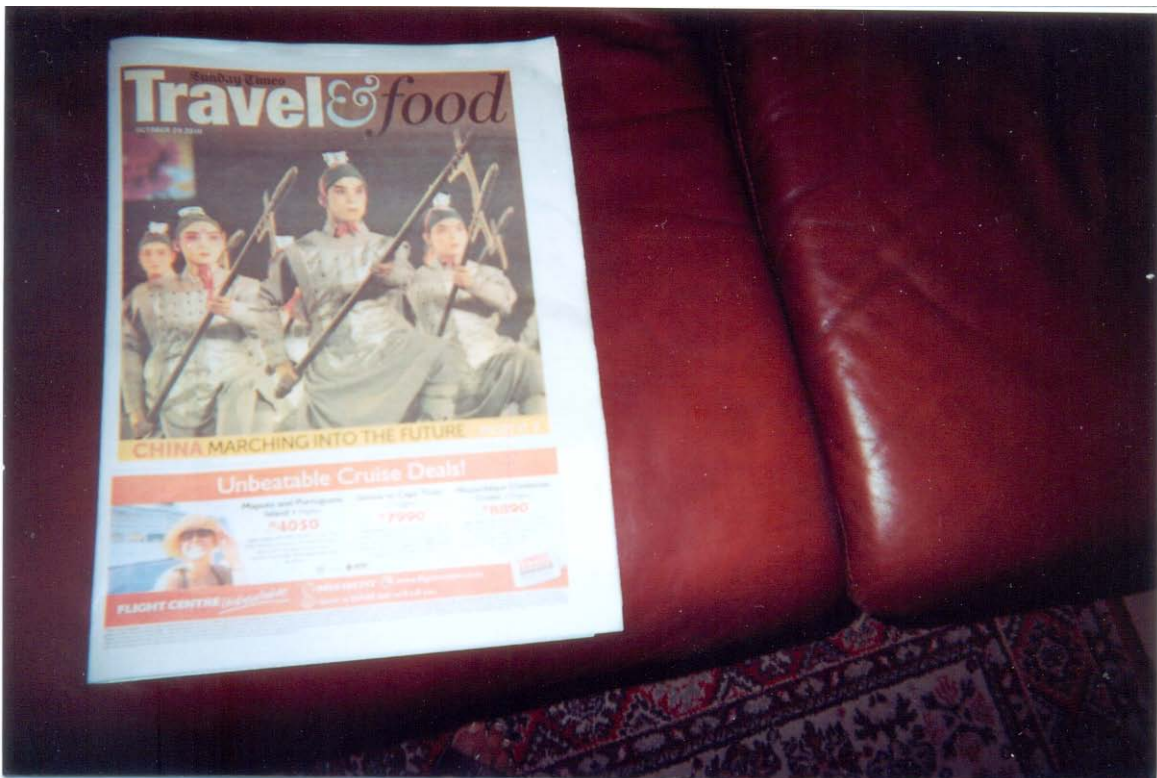


Figure 11: PHOTOGRAPH 1: TRAVEL AND FOOD SUPPLEMENT

PHOTOGRAPH 1 is that of the Travel and Food supplement of the Sunday Times newspaper. Shradha admits that this supplement is an “invaluable” resource to her. *“It has itineraries on Tourism and places to visit and pictures on it – I use this as my resource.”* It is evident how she uses the resource to contextualise her lessons such that learners (many of whom have little opportunity to travel) have a clearer perception of the experience. She has found that this method has worked for her learners. In this instance she works individually and independently to satisfy the needs of learners in this particular school.



Figure 12: PHOTOGRAPH 2: TOURISM TEXTBOOKS

PHOTOGRAPH 2 depicts various textbooks on Tourism. These are useful to Shradha in drawing up worksheets. Shradha said in the photo voice interview, *“I never use one text book – I use a variety of textbooks when I’m drawing it (a worksheet) up”*. Again it is evident that Shradha’s learning also takes place individually with resources. Her learning is self directed.



Figure 13: PHOTOGRAPH 3: INTERNET TOOL

In **PHOTOGRAPH 3** the computer screen shows the Firefox logo. Firefox is a tool that enables internet connection. This resource also has great value for Shraddha in terms of accessing content for Tourism. Linked to this is the email service and facebook. She uses the internet to communicate with other teachers. In the photo voice interview she said, *“I am in constant contact with other Tourism teachers and Technology teachers – I have their email addresses. I’m sending off emails to my friends regarding my subject matter and they are replying.”*

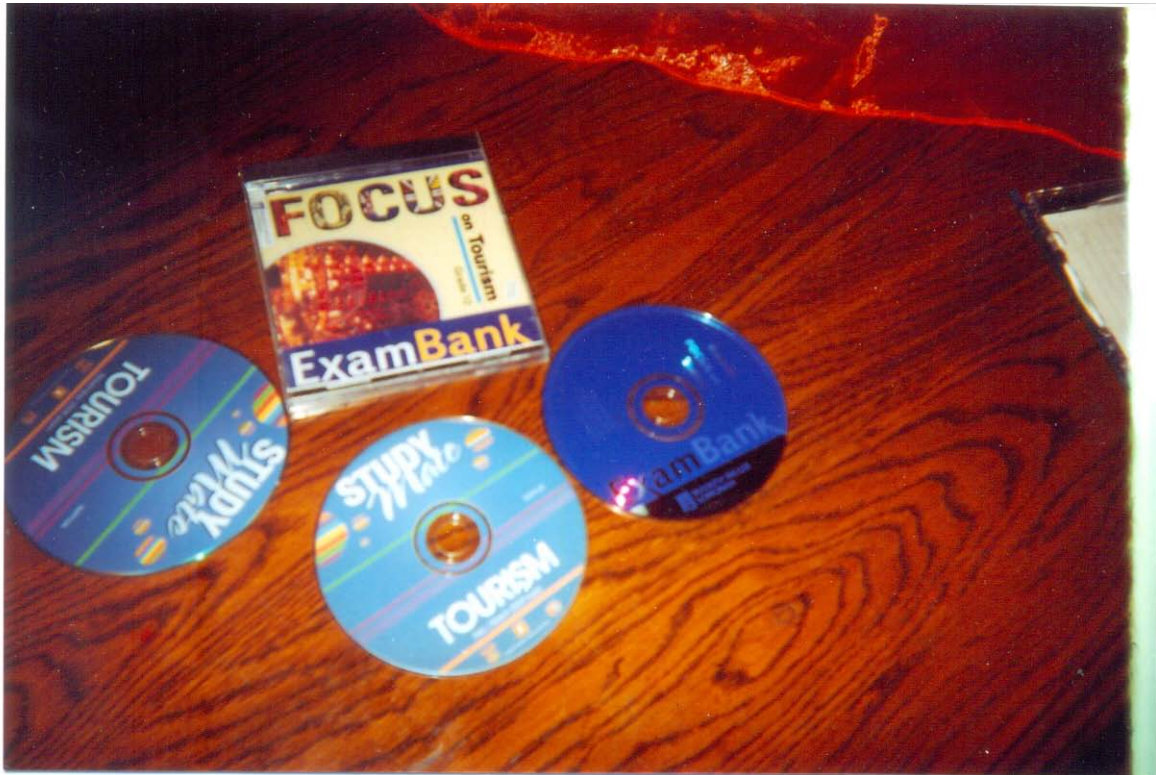


Figure 14: PHOTOGRAPH 4: CDs AND DVDs

PHOTOGRAPH 4 – these are of CDs and DVDs made available to Tourism teachers by the DoE. When I asked Shraddha in the interview how these were useful to her she replied:

If you are teaching something like Domestic Tourism or International Tourism and all the different ways in which you get your luggage checked – all we got to do is put a CD on where I will show the children exactly what happens at the airport and customs checks and visas as some of them are not familiar with these things.

Thus Shraddha uses resources which allow her to work individually to bring meaning to her learners.

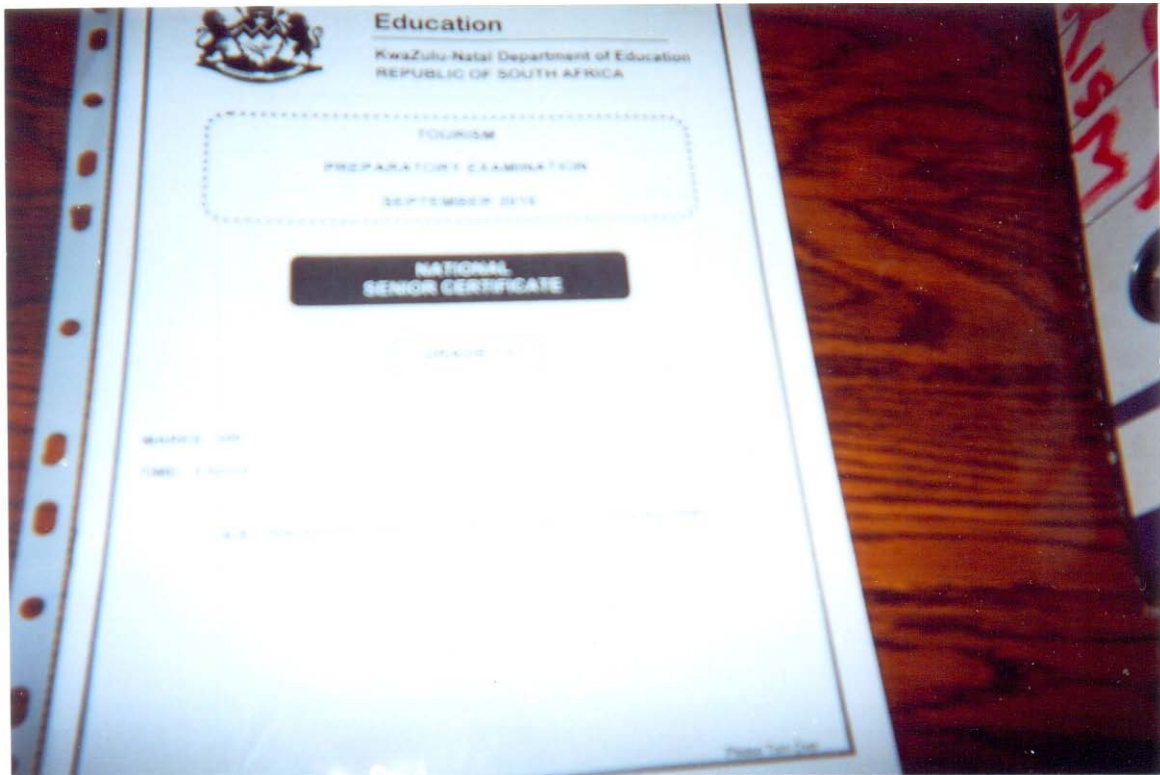


Figure 15: PHOTOGRAPH 5: PAST YEAR EXAMINATION PAPER

PHOTOGRAPH 5 –depicts a copy of a past year examination paper. Shraddha said in the interview:

Past year papers are so important because it teaches me how to phrase questions. I use them as a basis for my tests and exams and I'm learning constantly from it because I'm using material to teach me how to set my questions.

This knowledge is necessary for her to adequately prepare her learners for their testing programmes.

Shraddha took a picture of herself in her classroom. She related in the photo voice interview how her classroom is a valuable space of learning for her because this is the space where her interaction with her learners happens. She sees learners as a source of her learning. She explains, *“Learning does not only involve peers or management, it also involves learners and I feel I took this photograph because a lot of my learning came from my learners themselves.”* She cites their travel experiences and their knowledge with regard to electronic equipment as some of the sources of her learning from them. She also feels that it is necessary to take her guidance from them of how she should structure her lessons.

....they are encouraged to tell me when they do not understand work, or if they feel upset about a situation which we will then discuss and my learners have taught me to look at situations from a different perspective.



Figure 16: PHOTOGRAPH 7: SHRADDHA'S GURU

PHOTOGRAPH 7 captures Shraddha's guru. Shraddha said in the interview that *"all my inspiration in my life comes from him and all my strength comes from him."* She said that this spiritual dimension in her life has given her the ability of endurance. Further, she said, *"my calmness, compassion and understanding come from my spirituality. What I've achieved in spirituality has aided me in the classroom."* Here we can see her personal knowledge and beliefs shaping the type of teacher she is in her classroom. Her strong spiritual alignment adds to her demeanour as a teacher. She believes that without this dimension in her life she would not have coped as well as she does in her job.

Over and above her learning in her working context her personal knowledge was also instrumental in her development as a teacher. Her personal travel overseas and the experiences of her learners who have travelled help make her content more accessible to all learners.

Another significant influence on her attitude to learning is her parents. She believes that their support and example have ignited a quest in her for learning. This probably explains her open mindedness to continuing learning. This in turn nurtures her selfless desire to help and support other teachers.

Shraddha admits that on entry into the profession, she found herself like a fish out of water (pretty much the complaint of most novice teachers). She explained in the photo voice interview how her need to learn how to mark a register and keep teacher records had to come from the teachers she worked with. She said:

They don't teach you in college how to do markbooks, registers - all that admin stuff was not taught. For that knowledge I think I depended on my peers at the institution I was in – we helped each other. There was management staff as well that assisted in that and we just learnt by trial and error – and that was the way we learnt.

In journal entry 3 she wrote, *"The real classroom situation is nothing like the textbook method."* Shraddha's experience brings to the fore the need for teachers to be orientated into the school and that it should not be taken for granted that qualified teachers are fully

ready to be functional teachers. This is not true only of novice teachers, but also of experienced teachers entering new schools as each school adopts their own style making their records rather contextualised. Shraddha has shown that much of her learning was situated in the school.

Later in her career, as teachers transformed into electronic 'geeks', she found that that learning too had come from her colleagues, example, designing electronic spreadsheets, keeping Continuous Assessment records etc. None of these skills were learnt at formal courses. She also points out that these record keeping strategies were unique to this school, thus if she changed her school she would need to learn that school's protocol.

Another area that she felt her formal training left her wanting was with regard to classroom management. She felt that she had to seek advice from her peers to help her cope with her discipline. Initially, she felt that learners undermined her because she was petite and taught in a boys' school. In order to assert her presence in class she practiced making a stern face in a mirror at home and voice projection before trying it out in class. She found that worked well for her establishing herself as the teacher in control. In journal entry 2 she wrote, "*I stood in front of a mirror experimenting with different stern facial expressions and voice projection.*" Eventually she achieved her goal, "*....learners understood that I was no pushover.*"

The above examples show Shraddha taking control of her learning and experimenting with different strategies, on her own. This demonstrates her individual learning. However, she felt she needed to do more. Thus, in order to further develop her discipline strategies she attended a formal course. One of the things she used successfully from this course was not engaging a learner in an argument. She isolated the learner and the lesson proceeded with no further disruptions –"*I learnt this at a workshop I attended,*" (Journal entry 3).

In the early days of her career Shraddha found that by chatting to other teachers she realised that they experienced similar problems as she did. They also exchanged ideas on how to handle problems in the classroom. This reassured her that there was nothing wrong with her and that she was not a failure. This consequently instilled confidence in her:

By networking with other teachers, who were experiencing the same problems, I was able to obtain some assistance and it dispelled the notion that I was the only educator experiencing discipline problems.

This community then formed the pillar of support for these trainee teachers. This shows the value of teachers working socially to support each other in their learning. In this case the teacher was able to develop her pedagogic knowledge in an informal way with other teachers. Previously we saw how content was learnt in a community of Tourism teachers.

Another example of Shradha learning pedagogic knowledge was when she learnt from an experienced colleague how a seating plan can help maintain discipline in the classroom. After trying this suggested technique she admits in journal entry 2, *“that bit of information proved invaluable and I still use it today.”*

Reflection is one of the ways she uses to assess her work in the class. She writes in her journal, *“...after spending the night thinking about the situation (lesson that didn’t go well) I would go back and try a different method to achieve better results.”* This illustrates that the educator is able to identify where her skills or lessons are lacking on her own by reflecting on her lessons.

Shradha felt that the DoE workshops have been useful in providing educators in the Tourism learning area with guidance on assessments. She also used the DoE policy document to guide her in the content she delivered in both learning areas. The onset of the electronic age has been especially useful in keeping teachers in contact and abreast with the current trends. In journal entry 7 Shradha bears testimony to this, *“...whether it is bombing in Pakistan or a mudslide in Mexico – it affects Tourism and the rand-dollar exchange etc.”*

Sharddha’s learning takes place within a very interactive system where her learning depends on working with other teachers. The nature of her subjects sees her working closely with other teachers. Further, she appears to be comfortable and content to also share with others. She creates the impression that she is a firm believer in lifelong learning thus does not see her need for development a weaknesses but rather as strengths because it builds her confidence and wets her appetite to want to know more. Further, in journal entry 2 she

declares that *“the informal discussions in subject committee meetings, staffrooms and with educators from other schools have assisted in teacher learning.”* From Shraddha’s learning experience it can be seen that learning is on going and that it is necessary for teachers to engage in life long learning.

The matrix below reveals that the greatest part of Sharddha’s learning occurs in the unplanned (intentional)/ social quadrant. This is so because of her having to “train on the job” into a new learning area. The matrix also shows her engaging in learning in the planned (intentional) quadrant. This learning takes place both individually and socially. Minimal learning takes place in the unplanned (incidental) /individual quadrant.

4.7.1. SHRADDHA’S INFORMAL LEARNING

INDIVIDUAL

- Trial and error- learnt classroom management strategies eg. Practice stern face.
- Researching- internet, magazines, newspapers- content knowledge.

- Reflecting on lessons- learnt to identify her own needs.
- Practicing strategies at home before teaching to learners.
- Attended course on classroom management.
- Analysing past year papers- learnt how to phrase questions at matric level.
- Reading textbooks, policies – learnt content and curriculum knowledge.
- Accessing assessment requirements from policy documents.

UNPLANNED(incidental)

PLANNED(intentional)

- Emailing friends- sharing information about content and assessments- contacts extend beyond school, province and country.
- Asking colleagues how to design spreadsheets and to keep CASS records.
- Listening to peers- learnt classroom management strategies eg. seating plan.
- Accessed information from HOD- learnt how to draw- Technology.
- Networking with teachers she met at workshops- share ideas, address problems.
- Accepting guidance and advice from her parents who influenced her learning.
- Discussing pedagogic and content matters with management and peers.
- Asked peers for assistance- learnt how to compile electronic spreadsheets.
- Telephoned teachers from other schools- shared and exchanged ideas.
- Liaised with learners- shared travel experiences.

- Set up meeting with a friend- learnt how to teach a new section.
- Attended a school workshop- learnt classroom management skills.
- Interaction in workshop- learnt how to plan.
- Attended subject committee meetings.
- Attended cluster meetings.

SOCIAL

Figure 17: MATRIX OF SHRADDHA'S LEARNING

Adapted from Reid's model in Mckinney, 2005 cited in Fraser, 2007

4.7.2. SUMMARY OF SHRADDHA'S INFORMAL LEARNING

Shraddha's learning is interactive and mostly unplanned. Most of her learning appears to happen socially. She takes the initiative to stay in contact and be a part of a community of teachers.

Her peers at her school support her learning thereby creating a collegial learning environment. Shraddha also engages in individual learning using various resources to access both pedagogic and content knowledge. She also uses electronic media – the phone and internet to stay in touch with each other teachers who exchange and share knowledge, information, resources etc with her. They also support and encourage each other in their learning.

She also engages in a lot of reading in an attempt to keep abreast with the content of her subject (Tourism). By being proactive in her learning that is, taking the initiative to seek the different types of knowledge she thinks she needs, she is not stuck in the rut. She keeps up to date with current happenings and keeps in touch with the DOE website.

Shraddha notes the importance of both formal and informal learning. Her formal training proved to be insufficient in making her a competent teacher. She found that she had a lot to learn from her peers informally to help her function as a fully fledged teacher in the class and school. Later, she learnt how to be a Technology and Tourism teacher from peers but still felt she should enrol for a course in Technology. Further, she felt that a course in classroom management was necessary. She makes it clear that while most of her learning is unplanned (incidental)/social, planned (intentional)/ social learning is necessary in her learning as it helps her to navigate her example by way by planning and structuring for the year.

4.8. NARRATIVE 4: RADHA

Radha qualified with a Social Science degree in 2008. However, in 2006, during her examination leave, she assisted at a primary school teaching grade 5 Mathematics and grade 6 and 7 Life Orientation. She took this post to help the school who needed a teacher to fill in for a few weeks, while a teacher was recovering from an illness. She returned to university to complete her Social Science degree. Two years after completing her Social Science Degree she took up a governing body post at Ayodhya High. She declared in journal entry 1 *“I always wanted to be a teacher.”* She only chose Social Science because of the advice of a guidance counsellor, but she says that she has no regrets as she enjoyed her studies.

As she enjoyed the experience of teaching, she enrolled for the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) to obtain a professional teaching qualification. This is now her second year at the school and by the end of the year she would have completed her teaching qualification. Her specialisation subjects include English, Geography and Life Orientation.

Entering the profession without training was not an easy feat, but Radha was not deterred by the challenge. In her journal entry 1 she recounts her challenge of entering the classroom without training and experience, *“I started teaching without prior instruction.”* In the photo voice interview she said:

I came in as a blank slate – I didn't know anything.....I just had my simple degree and I didn't know anything about teaching..... First day on the job – I was given a textbook and was expected to teach – I was thrown in the deep end.

This meant that Radha had to learn how to be a teacher on the job. In other words her learning was situated.

She explained in the interview how her learning on site unfolded. She said, *“I didn't know much until chatting to other teachers and chatting to my colleagues.”* In journal entry 1 she describes how she gradually picked up the pedagogic knowledge necessary to function as a teacher. She wrote, *“From talking to my HoD and colleagues I learnt so much ... about something called a lesson plan and a forecast.”* In the interview she admitted that the amount of administration work expected of teachers *“was a big shocker to me.”* However,

she said that with the help and guidance of her peers she saw the school as *“my foundation of learning.”* Thus, her first source of learning was learning from experienced teachers. This means that her learning happened collaboratively. Her colleagues shared their knowledge with her so that she was able to learn how to function as a teacher.

While Radha tried to draw on her personal knowledge, such as her experience as a learner and how her teachers taught her, she still felt a huge gap in her knowledge, especially since the changes in education since her days in school. She therefore found:

My HoD had to sit me down and say, *“Ok, this is what a lesson plan looks like. This is what a lesson plan is structured to do or help you with. This is what an assessment standard is.”*

Radha’s need to know this knowledge highlights the importance of teachers’ pedagogic knowledge in relation to teachers’ competence in the classroom. In this case her learning was planned (intentional) as her HoD set up a meeting to brief her on what she needed to know.

Radha points out that while she learnt everything she now knows about teaching on site from her HoD and peers, her PGCE course at university also extended her knowledge in preparing her to be an effective and efficient teacher. She wrote in journal entry 1, *“While doing my PGCE and talking to my lecturers and other friends who were doing the course, some of whom were already experienced teachers, I learnt a lot.”* An example of what she learnt that was useful to her was *“how to be in control of my class.”* While this learning happened at university it was as a result of informal discussions she had with her peers. They shared their challenges and experiences and offered each other advice on how to deal with particular situations. This group formed a community of student teachers with varying degrees of experience. The advice that she got from them was that in order to maintain good classroom management *“I was not to be friends with the learners”* (Journal entry 1). Further, whatever she learnt in this community reinforced what she learnt from her peers at school. Teachers’ learning in this way is an example of collaboration in an unplanned (incidental) way.

Being a novice, and having not had any training, also left Radha with a dire need to learn content knowledge. Again she pointed out in journal entry 1 that her colleagues were her

first source of learning. She wrote in journal entry 2, *“my colleagues helped me to understand certain terms or poems. I learnt while talking to my friends during the break time – how to do this or that.”* Thus she admits that over the months “I learnt how to communicate with my peers and HoD for direction.”

Radha has found that her interaction with teachers in various ways has actually contributed immensely to the development of her knowledge reservoir as a teacher. This indicates that she is comfortable learning in a social environment. In journal entry 2 she shares this realisation:

I’ve learnt while standing and just conversing with my peers or while sitting at the table with my friends in the staffroom. I also learnt while talking to other teachers from other schools. It’s strange that we actually learn all the time in some of the weirdest places.

In journal entry 1 she said she, *“even learnt while chatting to teachers at the mall!”* It is evident that Radha’s learning has been largely social as she has been learning from and with others.

While learning on site her PGCE course helped to both reinforce and fill the gaps that still remained in her development. Learning in this way also offered Radha the opportunity to practice what the course taught her and take back to her lecturers, information about what worked and what didn’t for her. Commenting on how the course bridged the gap in her knowledge, she wrote in journal entry 3:

I’ve actually learnt how to use different assessment strategies. I did not know there were various types, but my lecturer helped me to understand various strategies and how to use it.

In this example we can see how Radha’s formal and informal learning are working in tandem towards her development as a teacher.

Although Radha has found herself in “the deep en” she feels that the support system she finds at the school has helped her gain confidence in herself. In journal entry 3 she wrote, *“My peers have DEFINITELY played a big role in boosting my confidence.”* In journal entry 5

she wrote, *“This year has been awesome! I’ve had great help and motivation by so many in the English department.... they have been my support group. They have taught me so much!!!”* Radha’s experience reflects the need for teachers to feel supported by each other. It also highlights how learning can boost one’s confidence. She wrote in journal entry 5, *“They have built my confidence and made me believe in myself as an educator.”* From the enthusiastic way that she responded it is evident that she has gained a sense of self worth as a teacher by others believing in her.

4.9. PHOTOGRAPHS

The following photographs depict the Radha’s informal learning opportunities.

One of the photographs is of the learners. Radha explained that she saw her learners as a source of learning for her. She said that one of the important things she learnt from university is, *“children do not come to the classroom as blank slates.”* She explained that during her experience in the classroom she was able to pick up alternate answers to questions from them. In the interview she said learners would say, *“Mam, we learnt that this is another answer,”* Radha saw this as a way of expanding her knowledge by listening to learners’ perspectives.



Figure 18: PHOTOGRAPH 1: CORRIDOR OUTSIDE RADHA'S CLASSROOM

Photograph 1 is a picture of the corridor outside her classroom. Radha claimed in the interview that this photograph is most significant in depicting her learning space. She cited examples of how she would frequently meet with teachers in the corridor informally to find out about something she wasn't clear about. She said that she would say, *"I don't understand what this poem is about,"* or *"Sir, Could I please speak to you outside your class."* The opportunity to chat also provided Radha with a way to address her challenges immediately. *"If my learners are misbehaving, they would say let's see if there are ways in which we can help."* She also said that if she didn't *"know something in administration"* or *"if there is something that I am personally going through"* she found that the teachers within the vicinity of her classroom to be extremely helpful and supportive. She described her growth in this space as *"a holistic growth for me."* Yet most of what she learnt in this space was unplanned (incidental).

With regard to the support these teachers give her in teaching, she described how a teacher helped her with a particular aspect she was having trouble with:

I had to teach cartoons but was having trouble with some of the questions in the task. I went to Mr. P and he helped me. He went through it in detail and gave me alternate ways of answering different questions (Journal entry 6).

Radha displayed no inhibitions about approaching others for help. She did not see her lack of knowledge as an inadequacy but rather as an opportunity to develop into a competent teacher. She found that working collaboratively worked best for her.

Radha said in the interview that she was very comfortable learning here and in this way. She said:

I think I am comfortable because of the people I am actually talking with. The relationship I have with them – that this kind of method can be done. They are approachable – because I don't think if it was anybody else, I would have been so comfortable saying 'please can I see you outside my classroom –I don't know what's happening.' I think it is the people I work with that make this – corridor talking- actually possible.'

This illustrates that Radha trusts the people she seeks help from therefore she is comfortable in approaching them at any time. Although she is a novice, her attitude is not one of impressing others, but rather of admitting her need to learn and seeking to address that need. She chooses to learn from her experienced colleagues.

A photograph of teachers in the staffroom was taken. In this photograph Radha has captured her colleagues in the staffroom. She described them as her friends, in the interview. She said in the interview that she valued their experience and that they were *"actually being my backbone in the sense of helping me."* Radha said that the staffroom is where they meet during breaks and share their experiences of the day. For Radha this interaction with her friends gives her a lot of guidance in terms of her development. She said that they would tell her, *"Ok this is what you need to get in order, this is what you need to do ... er ..maybe don't do this – do it this way."* Radha found that this direction from her friends was useful to her as she had no previous experience and this advice helped to keep her on track with her friends in the school. By her friends providing guidance and sharing their experiences with Radha, they saved her from making the mistakes that they might

have made when they started out. Also by learning from her friends Radha was able to keep abreast with what was required of her. The interaction with her friends in this way shows Radha's learning was spontaneous and not planned.

One of the things she learnt from this interaction with her friends was to compile her register and reports electronically. Radha said in the interview, *"they teach me new ways of doing stuff."* This shows that in this way Radha was able to develop further, in a short space of time. She knew how to compile a register but now via this interaction she learnt an improved method that teachers at this particular school are using.

Radha said that their staffroom chats are also avenues to pool their ideas about different strategies that each of them use to deal with particular issues. In the interview she used the example of how to handle children who are misbehaving:

Each and every one would give a different way to handle it. The first one would have said, 'take out the detention book,' the next – 'send them to Miss D,' the next – 'isolate the pupil' or another, 'counsel the pupil'.

From this example it is evident how Radha has a range of options to choose from. Thus her friends' experiences have contributed to her development by them sharing their knowledge with her. It is also evident that by teachers sharing their ideas in this way, teachers are exposed to alternate methods of dealing with issues. They can also share ideas on what didn't work and why it didn't. Radha's view supports this when she said in the interview:

they've learnt from other teachers – how they have taught and brought it to this school that they are currently teaching at and also trying to develop new ways of teaching these....When they tell me stuff – it's more like what they've learnt – not only in this school, but in other schools that they previously taught in.

Radha said that from Miss. T., a Drama teacher who sits at her table, she has learnt how to integrate a bit of drama to teach poetry. She said that she learnt, *"those little things that actually make the lesson enjoyable for the learners and makes them want to participate in it."* Radha thought that this was an *"awesome idea"* as she learnt a way to sustain her learners' interest in the lesson.



Figure 19: PHOTOGRAPH 4: RADHA'S BEDROOM

Photograph 4 is a picture of Radha's bedroom. She uses this space to learn individually. At home she tries to access content knowledge by reading. Radha explained, *"I have all my books lying on one side of the bed ... I have books about teaching."* She said that she is trying to enhance both her pedagogic and content knowledge. Her learning here is self directed. She admits that due to the demands of her job and studying she finds it difficult to access sufficient information. She explained that soon she hopes to be more insightful about, *"these are different ways you could teach a poem, these are different types of poems you can get .."* In the interview she acknowledged, *"I am lacking now."*

She said that she feels the impact of this lack of development in her teaching. She explained in the interview, *"If I am teaching a particular language area, I'll teach it because that's what is on the worksheet."* It appears that Radha would feel more confident if she had a bigger reservoir of knowledge to draw on when deciding how to teach a particular aspect. At the moment in these 'formative' years it seems like she is dependent on teaching in a somewhat restrictive way by teaching the way other teachers are comfortable teaching. She declared in the interview, *"I'm not immersed in that, meaning I don't know everything about*

it.” She feels that if she knows more than she already knows she would feel more confident in her classroom. She explained in the interview:

If I’m going to teach something, I would love to know all that I can about it and that’s why I check with other teachers – corridor talks – that’s how I learnt now about other ways.

Radha acknowledges that being a novice teacher, there is a lot she has to learn. According to her, her main source of learning is the teachers in her department. She said in the interview:

They are readily available. I think the most important thing that they have given me is the fact that I can come to them at any time – I know help is available. I can come to them at any time and know that they know that this is an environment where we are learning and growing I can’t learn everything at once – but it is a process for me.

Radha illustrates that much of her development is a result of her liaison with other teachers in her school. She admits that she is comfortable learning in this way as she trusts her colleagues who are committed to supporting her. She does not sound like she has any inhibitions about approaching them for assistance. Thus, her development happens informally.

While teachers at the school have played a significant role in Radha’s development she says that there were also others in the form of administration staff who have also been instrumental in her development. She elaborated in the interview:

I can remember days when I used to leave school only at 5 – sitting with Mr. C, the librarian. He would help me, like.. ‘that’s why we have the internet here. Let’s look’ or “Why don’t you try something new in your paper? – I saw X doing this.

In this way Mr. C has exposed Radha to more ideas and her learning seems to be purely incidental. While she might have been looking for content, her interaction with Mr. C helped her stumble on some pedagogic knowledge as well.

Another person, the school secretary, shared ideas about handling badly behaved learners with Radha. Radha said in the interview that Mrs. V taught her how to follow a particular procedure when handling disruptive learners. *"She'll say 'Phone the parent, make a record of it – when the issue comes up again, you have proof."* Radha said, *"These were little things but it helped me."*

Another important area of Radha's development was her classroom management strategies. She said in journal entry 4, *"I definitely need to improve on my discipline."* In the short time that she has been a teacher she has accessed help in various ways. In journal entry 3 she wrote about how she *"learnt from various teachers how to improve classroom management and gain control"* at a workshop held by the school. Further, her course taught her *"so much on how to be a classroom manager."*

However, there is still more that she has to learn as she declares, *"I definitely need to improve on my discipline strategies."* (Journal entry 4) One of the strategies that she has learnt from her peers and implemented successfully in her class is making her presence felt as the authority in the class. However, she hasn't had much luck with two classes that she teaches. She explained that she turned to her superiors but the problem still exists. She admits that not having that control with these classes makes her feel inadequate. She wrote in journal entry 4, *"Do I blame myself as being an inadequate teacher?"* She has decided to motivate herself with this motto. *"All with good timing and experience, you will become better."*

Thus in journal entry 6 she speaks more positively about her issues with class discipline. She wrote, *"I had an incident of poor behaviour with my grade 10's. I had to call my HoD and he actually made a difference. I've learnt if I need helpjust ask ... that's all."*

Reflection seems to be an important indicator to Radha with regard to how she should adapt her lessons. She said in the interview that she looks at how she could have done a lesson she already taught differently. She said, *"If I taught poetry ... and the children do not like the way I maybe explained it, ...with the next class I'm going to try another method to teach them to make them understand it."*

She also said in the interview that being part of this study made her:

Reflect a lot on person I am becoming as a teacher... where are the areas I still need to improve and also on the fact that I have so many people around me who are willing to help.

She said that this experience has outlined her journey in the following way:

I had to get a professional qualification; I then had to be exposed to different people, different ways of teaching, and different ways of handling a classroom.

The learning plotted on the matrix shows that Radhas's informal learning happens in an unplanned (incidental) manner. She engages in very few forms of other learning opportunities. Further, her learning happens socially rather than individually. It is likely that as she gains experience and is exposed to more learning opportunities her strategies of learning will change. The matrix also shows that there is very little learning indicated in a planned (intentional) manner.

4.9.1 RADHA'S INFORMAL LEARNING

INDIVIDUAL	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talking to librarian – learnt pedagogic knowledge. • Communicating with school secretary – learnt discipline protocol. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflecting on lessons – learnt how and where to improve. • Reading books- learnt content and pedagogic knowledge. • Researching content, teaching strategies on web.
UNPLANNED (incidental)	PLANNED (intentional)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chatting to teachers in the corridor- learnt from peers, clarify issues, seek advice. • Receiving guidance from HOD- how to deal with discipline issues. • Liaising with teachers in the staffroom- exchanged ideas. • Seeking advice from librarian. • Listening to advice from school secretary. • Exchanging ideas with lecturers and fellow students. • Receiving feedback from learners- learnt if lessons, methods were successful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attending school workshop on discipline.
SOCIAL	

Figure 20: MATRIX OF RADHA'S INFORMAL LEARNING

4.9.2. SUMMARY OF RADHA'S INFORMAL LEARNING

Radha's learning has mostly been moulded around the teachers she works with. She speaks extensively of gaining knowledge ranging from content to pedagogic knowledge by informally engaging with the teachers on site. Over time she has found that these interactions have resulted in boosting her confidence and improving her performance in the classroom.

Radha is neither afraid nor embarrassed to approach teachers for assistance, indicating that she is totally comfortable learning in this environment. She turns to either her HoD, the experienced teachers in her department or her colleagues in the staffroom depending on what it is she needs to learn.

Her interactions with the administration staff have also added to her knowledge with regard to discipline and setting of examination peers or researching. Her friends too, as a result of their informal chats in the staffroom have offered Radha a host of ideas to select from. These sessions have made her realise that different teachers have different approaches in dealing with particular issues.

It is evident that the teachers at the school form a strong foundation for her development. She has not yet begun to extend her interaction with teachers outside the school yet, however she has mentioned sharing information and getting advice from her peers and lecturers in an informal manner in her PGCE group.

She also engages in some individual learning by reading and surfing the internet.

4.10. NARRATIVE 5: YASHODA

This is Yashoda's second year at Ayodhya High. She qualified as a teacher two years ago from the University of Kwazulu Natal with a B.Ed degree, specialising in English, Life Orientation and Technology. At the moment she teaches English and Life Orientation to grades 8 and 9. She is employed by the school's Governing Body.

She said in the interview that after qualifying she felt empowered as a teacher, *"I felt that whatever I learnt at university would be sufficient and that I could come in and practice whatever they said in terms of discipline and even in terms of content."* However, she soon felt like all she learnt formally began to unravel – *"I felt whatever I learnt at university- it didn't work at all."* In the interview she explained she that her biggest challenge was maintaining discipline in her classroom. Her formal training left her with a false blanket of security by leading her to believe that she knew all she needed to know to function adequately as a teacher. She came into the profession with knowledge that she thought would ensure her perfect assimilation in the class. She said, *"When we went to university they gave us books and said do this, this, this and it would work perfectly and when you come here – you find that it doesn't work."* She was referring to techniques regarding discipline that university textbooks exposed her to. She said at university the textbooks offered the following alternatives to dealing with discipline – counsel the learner, do not isolate the learner, always be civil, do not pick on the learner- may be dealing with other issues, be understanding and patient. They were told that this approach would earn them respect from the learners. However when she was placed in the reality of a classroom, she found that she was ill equipped to deal with the discipline issues that presented itself in the classroom. The impact of this is evident in journal entry 1 when she wrote, *"I soon lost confidence as an educator due to discipline issues..."* From Yashoda's experience we can see that there is no textbook method to solve challenges in the classroom. In fact it highlights that teachers only really begin to learn how to be efficient when they start encounter the challenges within their classrooms.

As dejected as she sounded, she did not give up. She found solace in the support of her HoD. She elaborated in the interview, *"I think the most support I had in my learning was*

from my HoD she would always guide me." She later discusses the pivotal role her HOD played in her development in the Social Science department.

One strategy that she learnt from her HoD was to set time limits. Yashoda explained that when she realised that her learners were rowdy during the completion of activities her HOD advised her in the following way: *"She would tell me –ok – you need to set time limits- you should say – in the next 5 minutes you are checking questions 1 and 2."* After trying this strategy Yashoda found, *"that would improve the discipline and they wouldn't get rowdy."* In journal entry 3 she wrote that her HoD's advice also included planning longer lessons, engaging learners in discussion by asking questions and monitoring completion of activities and getting feedback on responses. Yashoda found that her classroom management in terms of discipline really improved. Yashoda was successfully able to work collaboratively with her HoD. This marks Yashoda engaging in unplanned (incidental) learning with a social environment.

In fact this isn't the only person Yashoda has learnt from. Further examples of unplanned-social learning were evident. In journal entry 2 wrote about how other teachers, especially the experienced ones have contributed positively to her professional development. By engaging in with teachers in informal chats either in the staffroom or in the corridors she found herself gathering advice that she found useful in her development. She wrote:

I have found that during my two years of teaching, the advice I have taken and practiced in my classes given to me by senior educators has equipped me to develop more than what I learnt at university.

Further, she wrote in journal entry 1:

Educators in my department who had years of experience behind them soon started to advise me and provide guidance on how I should handle issues of discipline and the curriculum.

In journal entry 3 she cited an example of how Mr. L, a Life Orientation teacher, *"guided me with ways I could guide learners to grasp concepts and at the same time enjoy the section."*

The advice that she took from them made her realise, *“The focus was more teacher centred and issues such as discipline would only be addressed if I toughened up as an educator”* (Journal entry 1). In explaining how these teachers supported her, Yashoda wrote in journal entry 1, *“They often spoke to me after school or during the change of lessons providing and sharing input on what methods should be used.”* This example illustrates how Yashoda is engaging in informal learning. This interaction is not planned (incidental), and what she learns as a result of this interaction is incidental.

Yashoda found the advice she got from the experienced teachers valuable as *“the methods (both teaching and discipline methods) I learnt in university did not seem to work.”* As a result Yashoda found herself drawing on her knowledge of how her teachers taught her. She wrote in journal entry 3, *“I used the conventional method of teaching essay writing which I myself was taught when I was in school.”* But she found *“learners had difficulty developing their ideas and formulating paragraphs.”* When she shared this challenge with her grade controller, she shared *“a different teaching strategy that she was using”* (Journal entry 3). Yashoda admitted that when she tried this strategy she found, *“Learners enjoyed the writing exercise and were not frustrated.”* The collaboration she had with her grade controller resulted in her learning a new teaching strategy. Her learning in this school was happening socially and in an unplanned manner.

4.11. PHOTOGRAPHS

Yashoda took the following photographs to depict her informal learning.

A picture of her learners. Yashoda finds the learners as a source of her learning. She said in the interview that she tries to *“get responses from them”* when assessing why her lesson did not progress well. This information helps her in strategising for her subsequent lessons. Further, input from the learners is in the form of them saying, *“Mam, we need to know this or that.”* This feedback guides Yashoda in planning her lessons. She said in the interview, *“they always had me thinking and I knew I couldn’t go into the class knowing only what was in the textbook.”* She wrote in journal entry 2 about her classroom as a learning context, *“I feel the ideal context to do this is in the classroom with my learners”*. Yashoda was referring to establishing how successful her teaching was from her learners. She explained that here

she is able to *“identify methods and ways which are working for my learners and myself and also look at recommendations to problematic areas.”* Apart from gauging what methods are necessary and useful in her classroom, she is also able to establish what learners are enjoying. In journal entry 9 she wrote, *“Learning on the job is good as it helps me to identify the needs of the learners and what is or isn’t working well for me and my learners.”* Thus it is evident that the learners are an important source of Yashoda’s development as a teacher.

She photographed her HoD. Yashoda has already pointed out the invaluable support given to her by her HoD. Here she outlines the extent to which she has learnt from her. Mrs. V appears to form the pillar of strength for Yashoda in her development. In the photo voice interview she said, *“Mrs. V was always there.”* She explained that she found her guidance useful because she *“will always give us different strategies on what to do.”* One of the key areas that Yashoda required this support was in dealing with discipline. In the interview she said that at times she and her fellow novice teacher were ready to give up, *“we always felt we were doing something wrong.... sometimes I think I should just give up.”* It was at this point that she valued the support and guidance she got from Mrs. V. She wrote in journal entry 5:

She not only helps me by offering advice, she keeps me actively learning by granting me the opportunity to attend department meetings and workshops. She also helps me by providing readers and books based on the aspects of the education system which are new to me.

It seems that her HoD works hard in providing opportunities to integrate Yashoda in to the profession.

Mrs. V also heads the Social Science department meetings (subject committee). Yashoda wrote that these meetings are instrumental in her learning. She wrote in journal entry 5:

Educators in this department are always preparing mini workshops and handouts providing guidance of such aspects as discipline, utilising resources, assessment strategies and assessment tasks.

Yashoda was also given the opportunity to observe how Mrs. V conducts her teaching. She said that in this way she learnt how to pace her lessons and conduct herself in the classroom. She also felt that she learnt from Mrs. V by observing her. She wrote in journal entry 5 how this has helped her, “... by watching some of mine (lessons) and providing constructive feedback which I can use in my development.” This illustrates that Yashoda is amenable to learning from others to be a stronger teacher in the classroom. She acknowledges that there are areas where her development is lacking and has no reservations about her HOD guiding her development in those areas.



Figure 21: PHOTOGRAPH 3: CORRODOR

Photograph 3 depicts the corridor outside her class. This is the area in which assistance is almost immediately accessible. Yashoda described in the interview how she meets with her colleagues and HoD in the corridor during change of lessons and chat quickly about problems; usually about problematic *learners* *“We talk mainly about learners – discipline.”* This interaction contributes to Yashoda’s unplanned learning.

Referring to a photograph of her friends in the staffroom, Yashoda explained in the photo voice interview that this is the table in the staffroom that she shares with her friends. She described how her learning from them is a result of casual chatting about their teaching. For example, one of her friends who also teaches English to the same grade as Yashoda asked her, *“How did you start your lesson on advertising?”* This interaction led to her friend sharing an idea that she tried and found that learners found the lesson exciting. Yashoda declares that they constantly exchange ideas and try out each others ideas. Their group of friends includes a mixture of experienced teachers and novice teachers. Yashoda said in the interview that this group forms a support base in that *“whatever problem I have and I talk about it, they provide some sort of advice or guidance.”* She also cited an example of learning administrative knowledge from them when she learnt how to balance a class register which she said a senior member of staff *“just assumed we learnt that at university.”* Thus, Yashoda was able to pick up both content and pedagogic knowledge from her collaboration with her friends in an informal setting. This example warns of the tendency of schools of taking for granted the knowledge that newly qualified teachers come with.

The staffroom is the venue of all staff meetings. Yashoda finds that these meetings also contribute to her learning. She explained how the recent meeting dealing with staff allocations extended her knowledge:

at these staff meetings with everybody as a whole – I learn about these things – I don’t just want to learn about how to run my classroom. I want to learn about what goes into running a school.

She also explained that sometimes issues that arise in such meetings are confusing and she doesn’t understand. In such instances her HOD comes to her assistance:

Sometimes when something comes out in the staffroom (meeting) and we didn't understand the terminology then she (HOD) would come back and tell us this is what that meant and how it will affect you.

While Yashoda is still working hard on building her self confidence she sometimes feels brave enough to take her teaching into her own hands and try things the way she feels comfortable. In journal entry 6 she started shared an instance when she decided that the resource Life Orientation worksheet her peers asked her to use was not adequate enough for her. In an attempt to bring her own flair into the lesson Yashoda surfed the internet in search of a creative way to bring the realities of malnutrition and diseases to her learners. Yashoda's learning here is self directed and planned (intentional). She wrote in journal entry 6, *"Although provided with a worksheet from senior educators, I felt that the information was boring."* She elaborated that she felt *"the children needed to see the reality of such diseases"* to make her teaching more effective. She said, *"In order to have this creative and interesting lesson, I went onto the internet, researched information on real life incidences and also downloaded pictures to show the children."*

This marked a big step in Yashoda's development as she pointed out that she taught this lesson the previous year as she was advised to by her colleagues. However, the experience made her realise that she could do more with the lesson. She said in journal entry 6 of her previous lesson, *"The learners were bored,"* but with the new dimension that Yashoda attached to the old worksheet, *"The learners really enjoyed the lesson."*

In this way Yashoda was able to not only affirm a degree of self confidence but also establish her identity as a Life Orientation educator with her learners. Her effort marks her taking the reins rather than being dependent on experienced teachers telling her what to do. In journal entry 6 she wrote:

I enjoyed being able to get this information and presenting it to the learners as it was evident that by seeing the reality of such diseases along with notes helped them to absorb and understand the reality of malnutrition.

Thus, Yashoda was successful in meeting the objective of her lesson on her own.

While this is a step in the right direction in her development Yashoda does feel a little stifled in establishing her own identity in the school. She wrote in journal entry 8

Whilst we are motivated to learn and develop I feel that in some cases my development in terms of learning is based on what others want and believe in as educators and not on my own beliefs.

In the interview she elaborated on this, *“I came in here and I wanted to do group work – it was not acceptable.”* She said that her peers and supervisors complained that group work was ‘too rowdy’ but *“for me it wasn’t rowdy, it was my kids interacting.”* This could highlight the tension between newly qualified teachers and experienced teachers in terms of experienced teachers being rigid in their methods of teaching and not easily amenable to change. In this example Yashoda has to ‘unlearn’ what she was taught at university and conform to what experienced teachers think are effective methods of teaching. Thus in this instance she was stifled in her development. However, she noted that when she is more established as a teacher she will experiment with her own methods.



Figure 22: PHOTOGRAPH 5: TELEVISION SET



Figure 23: PHOTOGRAPH 6: RADIO

Photograph 5 & 6 are of audio/visual media. Yashoda declared in the interview that such media contribute to her development by extending her general knowledge. She said that especially with a subject like Life Orientation, one has to be up to date with what is happening in the world. She explained that their subject matter often results in them engaging in discussions where one has to refer to current issues. One example she cited was how ethical issues in sport highlighted in the media can be used in the sport section of the Life Orientation syllabus. Another example she used was extending discussions that arises in English comprehension lessons to current issues in the world. This is an example of her individual learning.



Figure 24: PHOTOGRAPH 7: GYM EQUIPMENT

Photograph 7 shows gym equipment. To help overcome feeling inadequate in teaching sport, Yashoda joined the gym. She explained in the interview, “... at University when we did Life Orientation, we did a lot of theory –but we didn’t do a lot of practical (work) and when I came here I made it clear I wasn’t sport orientated.” She said that someone at the school gave her some assistance, “someone showed us this is what you do, these are the stretches- but obviously they are telling you, not showing you, not showing you so I didn’t learn much then.” Her need to learn more in this area was also necessitated by the learners. She said in the interview, “the kids expect you to know what you are doing.... you have to physically show them, which was hard.” In an attempt to address this need in her development, she joined up at the local gym. She said in the interview, “But when I went to gym – that’s where I learnt to do the different stretches and exercises.”

This effort had a positive impact on her teaching. She admitted, “It made me more confident as an educator because I saw my kids were actually happy ... and you get rewarded when your kids are enjoying it.” Once again we see Yashoda take the initiative to acquire learning that would make her feel more confident in executing her lessons.

Yashoda uses reflection to establish to what extent she believes her lessons were successful. She explained the significance of the process in the interview as, *“Basically, reflecting on my day and seeing what works for me and what doesn’t and what I need to do.”* She said, *“Sometimes when you go home and you think about your day and think I did something wrong it wasn’t the learners fault. I realise that was my mistake – I could have done that in a better way for them to have understood.”* She displays an open-mindedness about her need to develop in this area where she learnt individually, however she displays some caution about who she accesses learning from at school.

While Yashoda has displayed instances of learning from her peers (socially) who volunteer their advice and support, she admits that she, *“wouldn’t be comfortable with the bulk of teachers.”* She went on to explain, *“I feel teachers would judge us.”* This also highlights that Yashoda hasn’t yet been able to establish a high degree of trust with all educators in the school. The result then would be that her access to assistance from teachers would be limited to the few who she does trust. *“Even if I needed help, I wouldn’t (go to others) .. they’ll think I don’t know what I’m doing.”* With regard to seeking assistance from experienced teachers, Yashoda seems to prefer to consult with a select few within the Social Science department. She shies away from other teachers because she is afraid of them judging her as incompetent and ineffective as a teacher. In this regard it seems that she feels a need to prove herself, therefore does not perceive her need to learn as an opportunity to develop but rather as weaknesses.

Yashoda prefers finding her support from her fellow novice educator. She said, *“In all honesty R is my support because I felt because we were both novice educators and we learnt from each other and we supported each other.”* While Yashoda acknowledges the support she received from the experienced teachers, she found that her greatest support came from her fellow novice teacher. This is perhaps because Yashoda feels less inadequate knowing that her colleague has similar gaps in her development, and that she can trust and confide in her. The support that Yashoda got from her fellow novice teacher was in the form of emotional support as well as sharing experiences and resources. In the photo voice interview she said:

I know when she learns something that day she will come and tell me, and if I learnt something... I will tell her

Her feelings of inadequacy were also fuelled by the fact that there was an absence of orientation for novice educators. She said in the interview that they did not know simple things like balancing registers, bundling scripts, moderating question papers: *“we didn’t know how to do that and everybody expects us to know.”* She explained, *“We learnt just by asking or watching someone do it.”* In journal entry 1 she highlights the fact that her journey on this road was not pleasant. She wrote, *“When I asked for help I found that many educators became frustrated and annoyed.”* This unfortunate reality rests on the fact that schools assume that newly qualified teachers come with sufficient content and pedagogic knowledge to operate as fully functional teachers. These novice teachers however indicate that there is a huge gap especially in their administrative knowledge. Experienced teachers get frustrated and misinterpret this lack of knowledge as incompetence. Therefore it is important that the school ensures that new teachers in the school, whether experienced or not, are orientated into the ways the school operates. The teachers she refers to here are not those from the social science department who she indicated earlier supported her.

In an attempt to take her development forward, Yashoda got herself *“more involved in school by being part of many different sub committees in the school.”* She explained that her engagement in these committees have exposed her to *“how much goes into the running of a school and at the same time learnt a lot more about the curriculum,”* (Journal entry 1).

Acknowledging that she needs to find ways that work for her, Yashoda does not wait for others to lead her. She takes the initiative to do her own research. She wrote in journal entry 2:

Research done on the internet as well as reading different articles and, journals and books has also proven to be very helpful in order for me to learn professionally in terms of allowing me to gather a vast amount of information which has helped me identify strategies that I can use in the classroom environment.

Yashoda indicated that these resources helped her access content as well as teaching and discipline strategies.

In journal entry 7 she said, *"I am developing my teaching skills by researching on the internet different methods of teaching."*

With regard to her classroom management, Yashoda admits that it is an area in which she is lacking. In journal entry 4, she wrote:

My development in terms of this problem area is taking place on an ongoing basis, by obtaining and practicing different methods advised by other educators. I am currently trying some methods and trying to find a method that will work for me most effectively.

It appears that Yashoda places a lot of emphasis on obtaining pedagogic knowledge to become more competent as a teacher. However, she wrote in her journal that she surfs the internet, reads magazines and textbooks to find content that can enhance both her and her learners understanding. She spoke of topics like global warming, healthy living etc that need reinforcement in her lessons. She therefore takes the initiative to learn individually. In Journal entry 7 she said that the internet *"is a fast and effective way of obtaining and increasing my knowledge."* In the interview she said, *"I realised how much I rely on the internet – it is so important in terms of getting more information."* She pointed out that the availability of this resource both at home and at school facilitates her access to it.

Yashoda has attended a few workshops in the short time she has been a teacher. For this she is grateful as she considers them a valuable source of learning. In the interview she said, *"... in terms of getting me opportunities to learn more ... for a first year educator I felt she (HoD) helped me a lot in every step I took."* In journal entry 7 she wrote, *"I have also been given the opportunity to attend a few Life Orientation workshops held by the DoE which has helped me develop and understand in terms of different areas in the subject."* This means that Yashoda finds that both formal and informal learning have helped her develop the necessary competences that she requires, in order to be an effective teacher.

She also found a workshop held at school to be useful in her development. In journal entry 7 she wrote, *"At a recent staff development workshop I learnt a lot in terms of techniques that I can apply in the classroom to maintain discipline."* She explained that this particular

workshop entailed a pooling of ideas by staff on effective discipline strategies. It was therefore not a formal programme conducted by experts.

Although Yashoda has pointed out that the reality of her job requires her to learn more than her qualification has equipped her with, she adopts a positive attitude towards the profession. In journal entry 7 she wrote, *“I would describe a good teacher as someone who is always willing to play the role of a life-long learner.”* This indicates her open mindedness to learning. She also believes that it is important for teachers to *“always be well prepared”* and to *“use creative methods to stimulate learning.”* Yet there are times when she feels, *“due to our lack of knowledge and experience we (novice teachers) are not recognised as valued teachers.”*

Yashoda’s experience draws our attention to the fact that novice teachers need support and guidance of experienced teachers in their development.

From the matrix we can see that Yashodha’s informal learning revolves around both planned (intentional) and unplanned (incidental) learning opportunities in an almost equitable manner. Further, her planned (intentional) learning happens in a social environment almost as much as her unplanned (incidental) learning. Very little unplanned (incidental) / individual learning is shown.

4.11.1. YASHODA’S INFORMAL LEARNING

INDIVIDUAL

- Receiving feedback from learners- feedback taught her how to adjust and adapt lessons.

- Consulting handouts from subject committee meetings- learnt about the expectations of teachers in the department.
- Observed HoD- learnt how to pace lessons.
- Observed by HoD- gave feedback=- learnt where and how to improve.
- Reflecting on practice- learnt what worked and what had to change
- Joined gym- learnt how to improve skill- boosted her confidence in teaching.
- Researching new teaching strategies on web. Learnt how to supplement lessons with information that will stimulate learners interest.

UNPLANNED(incidental)

PLANNED(intentional)

- Discussing how to deal with discipline issues, set time limits, teaching strategies with HOD.
- Talking to experienced teachers in the department about how to handle issues of discipline, curriculum.
- Shared and exchanged ideas with novice teacher.
- Listening to personal teaching strategy of grade controller.
- Chatting informally in corridor with peers- shared experiences, challenges, learnt how to deal with them.
- Interacting with teachers in the staffroom- learnt content and pedagogic knowledge by sharing ideas.

- Participating in subject committee meetings- shared knowledge, information with others.
- Attended schools discipline workshop.
- Attended subject committee mini workshop- learnt how to utilise resources, new discipline strategies, different assessment strategies, how to design assessment tasks.
- Engaging in sub committee meetings- learnt how school functions.
- Attending staff meetings- learnt about issues that affect the school and other issues that pertain to teachers.

SOCIAL

Figure 25: MATRIX OF YASHODHA'S INFORMAL LEARNING

Adapted from Reid's model in Mckinney, 2005 cited in Fraser, 2007

4.11.2. SUMMARY OF YASHODA'S INFORMAL LEARNING

Yashoda has developed many competencies by integrating what she knows with what she has been advised on by her experienced peers. While her interaction with other teachers is almost exclusively only with the teachers in her department, she is still able to learn much about the subjects she teachers from.

Apart from content knowledge her collaboration with her peers exposed her to different methods of teaching and discussing strategies that could help her improve her effectiveness in the classroom. Further her friends have also offered her support by sharing their ideas and experiences with her.

Yashoda's greatest source of support and guidance came from her HoD. While she may not have supported all of Yashoda's ideas, her aim always seemed to be focused on helping Yashoda develop into a competent teacher.

Although advice and support were readily available from the teachers in her immediate environment, Yashoda also took the initiative to learn on her own. She accessed journals and books and surfed the internet to find information that would enhance her learning. She also took the initiative to improve her skills and competencies in Life Orientation by joining the gym.

Further, the informal workshop at school also helped her to improve her skill as an effective teacher, while the subject committee meetings also helped her with planning lessons.

Staff meeting also contributed to her development as a teacher in the profession. It made her aware of issues other than teaching that affect teachers. In an attempt to be more integrated into the school and profession she elected to serve in various subject committees in the school thereby extending her knowledge as a teacher.

4.12. CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the narratives of each respondent outlining their informal learning in their workplace. The ways in which they learnt were plotted on a matrix adapted from Reids's quadrants of learning. The differences and similarities that emerge from the narratives will form the basis of the following discussion chapter.

CHAPTER 5

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The focus of this chapter is to answer the key research questions of this study, which are: How do teachers learn informally? To what extent does informal learning contribute to teachers learning and professional development? What factors support/hinder informal learning at school? In order to do this I will compare the similarities and differences across the narratives regarding how the teachers in the study learnt informally. The comparison will also highlight to what extent the teachers informal learning contributed to their professional development. I will first explore the similarities in their learning trends, and then point out the differences that emerge. Then I will discuss how the teachers' informal learning impacted on their professional development. Lastly, I will discuss the factors that support or impede teachers' informal learning at school.

5.2. KEY THEMES

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: HOW DO TEACHERS LEARN INFORMALLY IN THE CASE STUDY SCHOOL?

5.2.1. LEARNING USING RESOURCES

While resources like books, journals and computers primarily aid teaching, they also contribute to teacher learning as these teachers claim. For them, resources such as computers, the internet and books have contributed greatly to their development. In some cases it also marks the teachers' individual learning. They accessed these resources at their own behest to improve in those areas they thought they were lacking in.

Acquiring computer skills have helped them evolve into "techno savvy" administrators. They have become skilled in keeping electronic records, designing spreadsheets and accessing data on various programmes without having attended any formal computer course. These skills were learnt from their colleagues on a 'need to know' basis. This means that when a

teacher found that she needed to learn how to compile a mark sheet, she would consult with a colleague, who would teach her. In this instance teachers were engaged in collaborative learning and it seems likely that along their way they would share what they learnt with others and build on their existing knowledge with further interaction. This bears testimony to Burns *et al's*. (2005) findings that informal learning facilitates skills being learnt while performing one's job.

Apart from accessing content knowledge the internet helped teachers develop by enabling them to access pedagogic knowledge such as discipline strategies, observe model lessons to find teaching methods, design lesson plans and keep abreast with current educational issues on the Department of Education website. By accessing past year papers and memoranda, grade 12 teachers found that they were able to improve their skills in phrasing questions for their worksheets. This knowledge helped them to adequately prepare their learners for their final exam. One teacher spoke of how listening to audio media programmes helped boost her self confidence by teaching her the correct pronunciation of Afrikaans words, a second language to both her and her learners. Here we see a teacher take the initiative to improve her competence in the classroom. Another teacher reflected on how the television helped him in a similar fashion by exposing him to different teaching methodologies to teach grade 12 learners.

Reading also played a big role in teachers' development. All teachers in the study place emphasis on reading as a way to access knowledge that contributes to their learning. The material that they read includes: policy documents, journals, books, magazines, newspapers. Perusing these resources helped the teachers to extend their content and pedagogic knowledge. Both novice and experienced teachers spoke of accessing classroom management and teaching strategies by reading. This knowledge helped to fill the gaps in their expertise and contributed to them coping better in the classroom. It was apparent that this learning was self directed as each teacher decided what they needed to read based on what kind of information they needed.

Thus by engaging with resources these teachers were able to either extend their knowledge or expand their expertise. In this way teachers were able to empower themselves. It appeared as a personal choice for teachers to access learning either individually or socially.

The novice teachers found immense support from their HoD which they claim contributed to their development. One novice teacher explained that it was because of the guidance and support of her HoD that she was able to cope with both her teaching and classroom management skills.

An experienced teacher depended on her HoD to teach her new content and guide her translation into a brand new learning area. While another experienced teacher did not speak of support from her HoD she found that her development was supported by the guidance of her subject advisor. The respondent who is an HOD also pointed out his role as instrumental to the development of teachers in his care.

5.2.2. LEARNING THROUGH REFLECTION

It was interesting to note that all teachers listed their learners as a source of learning. All teachers in the study indicated that they used the feedback they received from their learners to adapt or adjust how they taught. The teachers thought that the learners directed their own learning by exposing where the teachers need to develop. For example if learners indicated to the teacher that they were not grasping a concept well, the teacher would have to seek an alternate method or style to teach the same lesson. All teachers cited similar examples. One experienced teacher also found that he was drawing on knowledge of other teachers from his learners who were being taught by other teachers who tutored his learners after school.

This is one example that highlights the need for teachers to be lifelong learners. As the learning context is diverse and dynamic, the teacher has to constantly adapt to the various factors that impact on his teaching. Knight (2002) warns that teachers' failure to embrace lifelong learning will result in professional obsolescence. Thus in a sense, the ideal teacher is a researcher and a reflective practitioner, constantly analysing her practice and making necessary changes to accommodate the influx of change that constantly impacts on teaching. Change can be triggered by learners' or teachers' experiences, context, or teaching requirements.

Apart from paying heed to what learners were saying about their teaching all teachers felt that it was important for them to reflect introspectively on their teaching as well. They all indicate that they engage in reflection. They claim that reflection is a good way to identify where their need for development lies. The teachers feel that they have made changes to their methodologies after reflection. One teacher was able to identify particular reasons why learners were not performing well by reflecting on her lessons. Another explained it as an ideal way to identify how lessons should be adapted. Mostly, teachers shared the view that reflection opened their eyes to where and how they needed to change their lessons.

Reflection allowed teachers to be introspective, honest and critical of their own practice. This concept of self analysis, believed to be described by Schon, is crucial to teachers' learning and subsequently altering their practice positively (Hager, 2001).

5.2.3. LEARNING THROUGH INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS

Teachers engaged in informal chats in different ways and in different spaces. Mawhinney (2010) referred to such learning as professional knowledge sharing. All teachers showed evidence of learning as a result of informal chats. These interactions took place in the following ways:

5.2.3.1. CORRIDOR CHATS

All teachers mentioned engaging with other teachers in the corridors. Novice teachers, especially, found this an immediate means to address both classroom management and teaching challenges. Teachers also find that when they engage with each others during the change of lessons, they often share their experiences and ideas on what they taught and how their lessons progressed. As a result the teachers found that this is a good way to support and encourage teachers. As teachers are placed in subject blocks and learners rove at the end of each lesson, teachers get the opportunity to meet in the corridors during the change of lesson. Thus this learning was spontaneous and incidental. Teachers learnt as a result of their interactions with others and from experiences which is supported by studies by Lieberman and Mace (2009) and Eraut (2004).

5.2.3.2. STAFFROOM

The staffroom is a venue that brings all teachers together. Mawhinney (2010) argues that congregational spaces like staffrooms are core places of informal learning as they encourage interaction, sharing and collaboration. Teachers in the study sit with their friends and during their breaks talk about their experiences and challenges that they might be encountering. Teachers from different learning areas and with varying years of experience create a pool of ideas for teachers to select from and experiment with strategies. The teachers also indicated that they feel encouraged by realising that other teachers in the school also experience similar difficulties. Similarly, Mawhinney (2010) believes that the learning that is stimulated in these spaces impacts profoundly on informal teacher learning and results in extended teacher knowledge, fostering trust, confidence and support for teachers, which in turn enhances teacher development.

5.2.3.3. PHONE CALLS/Emails/ INCIDENTAL MEETINGS

Other forms of informal chats that teachers spoke about were telephonic chats, emailing, and even bumping into teachers at a shopping mall where they shared some information about their teaching experience with each other. Sometimes these interactions lead to the teachers making arrangements to meet or share information and resources. One teacher even spoke about how she sends off a note to her colleagues when she has to clarify issues quickly. Another spoke of how teachers' visits to the school for various reasons result in chatting in the car park about their subjects or schools, invariably sharing both knowledge and information.

Most of the learning that happens in this way is incidental. This type of interaction comes across as being convenient and direct and helped to foster trusting relationships among teachers. Teachers indicated that they preferred learning in this way as it was direct and that they could access learning from people they were comfortable with. Putnam and Borko (2000) explain that the interaction or dialogue that emanates within communities is key to what and how teachers learn.

They also found that a quick call or email puts them in touch with their colleagues efficiently and effectively helping them to not only access resources but to clarify issues and rectify

problems that they might be facing. They also found that by putting their ideas together, for example, friends sharing ideas at the table in the staffroom during the breaks helped to create a reservoir of ideas. Novice teachers found this an ideal way to learn, as they had alternate ideas to choose from. Putnam and Borko (2000) also drew attention to this point ie. that learning is distributed across individuals and groups making learning social in nature.

Informal chats offered teachers the privilege of immediate onsite support and motivation to deal with their challenges. Teachers in the study seemed to favour learning in this way, showing trust and respect for the teachers they work with. All but one teacher, who is still a novice, indicated that they can turn to just about any teacher for assistance. The novice teacher expressed some reservation about doing this claiming she was afraid of being judged and perceived as incompetent. It is possible that over time this could change as she declared that she does not yet know all the teachers well. Such informal interactions have resulted in teacher development rather unconsciously, therefore is unplanned (incidental). It also proves that learning in this case study school is collaborative, collegial and contextualised, (Hager, 2001).

5.2.4. LEARNING BY COLLABORATING

The teachers seemed to use the words “peers” and “colleagues” interchangeably referring to teachers they worked with teaching the same subject or grade, or those teachers they shared a closer relationship with. All teachers spoke positively of how they learnt from their peers. Learning from each other helped to foster an essence of team working among the teachers. Some described how teachers sit and plan their lessons and programmes together, another spoke of how she learnt by being tutored by her peers, while novice teachers experienced some degree of mentoring from the experienced teachers. This is what Mawhinney (2010) refers to as ‘beehive activity’. An example of this was when a grade controller mentioned, in passing a new technique she was trying out, to the novice teacher. This incidental learning exposed the novice to a new strategy.

However, generally, learning from their peers happens more informally from their casual conversations and liaisons with each other. The merit of learning from peers seems to be the support that teachers feel from their colleagues. Novice teachers especially, felt that

having such support gave them the courage to persevere. The peers support at the school seems to happen naturally and frequently. A novice teacher also noted the role some non teaching staff played in her development.

The collaborative nature of learning at school was evident in the various ways that teachers learnt from each other. Teachers appeared to be comfortable consulting and liaising with the teachers in their respective departments on issues of coping with the syllabus, administrative duties, examination procedures, etc. Much of this learning took place quite incidentally. The successful experiences of the teachers' collaborative learning bears testimony to Kwakman's (2003) view that communities not only support but also stimulate learning.

Experienced teachers also engaged in collaborative learning by being part of networks and clusters. As researchers like Putnam and Borko (2000) suggest, teacher learning extends beyond the classroom and the school.

5.2.4.1. NETWORKING

Research studies indicate that teachers' learning should ideally take place in actual classrooms, however it is also emerging that experiences outside the classroom are also essential to learning, (Putnam and Borko, 2000). This study revealed a similar understanding with teachers interacting with teachers outside their own school context.

While experienced teachers network frequently with teachers from other schools, the novice teachers have not yet established such links with teachers. Their collaboration is still confined within the school.

Knight (2002) strongly advocated that communities, which we earlier established as an informal group engaging and sharing mutually, are prime sites for teacher learning. The experienced teachers all teach senior classes and it appears that meeting policy requirements and syllabus demands leads them to collaborate with other teachers. During these collaborations they claim to share knowledge, ideas, resources etc. to make their teaching experience a pleasant one resulting in what Wilson and Berne (1999) referred to as "shared meanings."

New groups of teachers form networks after meeting at formal gatherings like workshops and matric marking sessions. In this way teachers get the chance to see how teaching happens outside their areas. When teachers learnt from teachers at other schools, it illustrated that learning is not confined to the school, but extends beyond, to other schools as well. This was highlighted by Kwakman (2003) who reiterated that teachers working contexts also encompasses communities outside school.

5.2.4.2. CLUSTER MEETINGS

While cluster meetings represent planned learning opportunities, they do not follow a prescribed or structured formal programme of learning. Teachers revealed that much of their learning that happened in this forum was informal.

Experienced teachers spoke of their interactions in cluster meetings. These meetings bring teachers, usually matric teachers of particular subjects together to moderate learner assessments and plan testing schedules. Often teachers share how they are coping or not and others render assistance in the form of advice and resources to help teachers cope. As novice teachers are teaching in the GET phase, they have not been able to experience attending cluster meetings.

While cluster meetings themselves are beneficial to teachers from different schools sharing ideas and challenges, the teachers also extend their communication outside these meetings. The experienced teachers spoke of how they are in constant contact either telephonically or by email, supporting each other in dealing with the challenges of the curriculum or with sharing, designing, preparing resources. This illustrates Wenger's (1998) point that working in a community strengthens ones practice by creating a sense of belonging and shaping ones practice.

The respondents who had the experience of working in clusters spoke fondly of the value such interactions had on their development. For all of them the cluster group served as a crucial form of support in dealing with the curriculum and related issues. These teachers embraced the true essence of working in a community. Knight (2002, p.233) found that communities have a positive impact on teacher development and helps to "socialise them into established ways."

Researchers found that communities are at the centre of teacher learning and encourage teachers to be a part of such communities to strengthen their development, Lieberman and Mace (2009); Knight (2002); Mawhinney (2010); Wenger (1998).

5.2.4.3. SUBJECT COMMITTEE MEETINGS

As discussed above this planned (intentional) programme also offers teachers the opportunity to develop their informal learning.

Only one teacher did not mention learning at subject committee meetings. It is possible that since the teacher is an HOD, therefore leads such meetings, that he did not mention it as part of his development. The other teachers cited it as a good place to learn as it exposes teachers to different ideas as they pool their thoughts together when planning.

Teachers spoke of how at these meetings they are able to plan their approaches to the syllabus, share ideas on how to teach content, decide on assessment strategies, design spreadsheets particular to their subject requirements and plan remediation programmes for poor performance.

One novice teacher said that she found her subject committee 'workshops' very useful and felt that other departments should host similar workshops and that it should happen more often. The experienced teachers said that the subject committee meetings allowed them to work as a team in their planning for the year right from programmes of assessments to work schedules and lesson plans.

One of the novice teachers highlighted the value of what she called mini workshops that their subject committee put together. These workshops are designed to assist the teachers in the department with issues that they might be finding challenging. By engaging in collaborative learning the teachers were encouraged to share knowledge and ideas and consequently feel empowered. Teachers in the research conducted by Abrahams (1997) expressed similar sentiments about being involved in collaborative learning.

Subject committee meetings fall into the category of planned learning opportunities in school. For the four teachers who admitted learning at these meetings, the experience of working as a team, supporting each other, and working on solutions together, brainstorming

ideas etc. proved to be an essential part of their development. This idea is supported by Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) who advocate that learning communities are effective as learning strategies are sustained, embedded and collaborative encouraging a healthy interaction and a sense of team work among colleagues.

In a study conducted by Mawhinney (2010) a similar trend was observed where what she terms as 'congregational spaces' were a site of support and knowledge for teachers in the study. The following table summarizes how teachers learn informally.

5.3. RESEARCH QUESTION 2: TO WHAT EXTENT DOES INFORMAL LEARNING CONTRIBUTE TO TEACHERS LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

This study describes how the teachers in the study understand the extent to which their informal learning contributed to their professional development. The respondents' experiences indicate that their informal learning has contributed greatly to their professional development. They all admitted that their initial training was not sufficient to prepare them as competent teachers in the school or classroom. This supports the arguments of researchers who advocate that teacher learning is situated in schools and classrooms, (Knight, 2002; Kwakman, 2003; Putnam and Borko, 2000).

Both experienced and novice teachers found valuable learning taking place by interacting with peers and networking with teachers in other schools. They found that these opportunities helped to fill the gaps that they found in their development.

This study found that teachers are in need of support in their schools to help them in their professional development. It was evident that teachers favoured learning socially ie. in communities. In this way they admit that they were able to gain access to new strategies and ideas thereby increasing both their pedagogic and content knowledge.

Novice teachers found that learning in a social environment helped to create a greater awareness of their practice. When comparing ideas with others they found that they had to reflect more on what and how they were teaching. McIntyre (1993 cited in Hagger, 2008) found that experienced teachers learnt better from reflection than novice teachers.

Experienced teachers found that greater interaction helped them to clarify and sometimes rectify issues of the curriculum that troubled them. They also shared the many instances of acquiring new knowledge by informally chatting at formal gatherings like workshops. Often they say that they learn more by engaging informally during their breaks than from the actual workshop itself.

All teachers also spoke about how they felt motivated and confident when teachers supported them. Novice teachers said that they valued experienced teachers guiding them and exposing them to a range of alternate strategies as it helped them to gain confidence in their teaching. They found that there were particular teachers they could unhesitatingly call upon as they trusted them. Therefore, they claim that their development was spurred on by collaborating with experienced teachers. McIntyre (1993 cited in Hagger, 2008) recommended that novice teachers initially learn better from other peoples' ideas than their own as their reservoir of both knowledge and experience are limited. This was also evident in this study where novice teachers constantly drew on ideas of their peers.

Both novice and experienced teachers showed that the very nature of teaching is an opportunity to learn being more confident, informed, aware and creative in their jobs. These teachers illustrate that learning informally is part and parcel of being a teacher as the execution of one's job as a teacher is itself a learning experience.

5.4. RESEARCH QUESTION 3: FACTORS THAT SUPPORT TEACHERS' INFORMAL LEARNING

Many researchers working within a framework of situated learning claim that that the working context is the most suitable site for competences to be acquired, (Kwakman, 2003; Putnam and Borko, 2000 and Henze, 2009). Generally, the teachers in the study felt that their particular school supports teachers' informal learning. They spoke about how management encourages teachers to engage in development programmes within their departments. Teachers also referred to the role of their peers in their development. The following factors support teachers learning informally at the school:

5.4.1. SUBJECT COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The school encourages subject committees to host programmes where teachers learn from each other. Teachers are encouraged to work as a team and often get the opportunity to share knowledge, imbibe knowledge from others and tackle challenges collectively. Many spoke of how teams in subject committee meetings work towards chartering the way forward in handling the syllabus. This fosters a sense of collegiality, thus a healthy learning environment for teachers.

5.4.2. INTERNAL SCHOOL-BASED WORKSHOPS

Subject committees try to address issues of professional development by planning internal workshops. Teachers in the team provide guidance on issues of both the curriculum and classroom management. Particularly the novice teachers found these workshops useful. It also provides opportunities for teachers to draw on each others knowledge.

One experienced teacher however, felt that this was not sufficient. She said that it was burdensome as teacher workloads were demanding enough, but a novice teacher in the same department found these workshops extremely beneficial to her development and suggested that they should happen more frequently and that other departments should also host similar workshops that all members of staff could attend. She recommended that each department could address a different issue and hold workshops in that regard. If one department has a turn in a term, the school would have had four workshops, facilitated by teachers. Thus, novice teachers are highlighting the merits of planned social learning opportunities in school. It also shows that they prefer collaborative learning. Further, they highlight the fact that teacher education is not sufficient in preparing teachers for the classroom and that the gap is filled by on site learning. This is similar to Knight's (2002) view that learning is situated and has 'non formal qualities.'

5.4.3. STAFF MEETINGS

Teachers felt that the school is supportive in that it allows for teachers to develop by engaging in regular meetings where new policies are unpacked and discussed. A novice teacher said that while staff meetings are a site of learning for her by exposing her to important details regarding her job, she often felt that she needed clarity and guidance in

terms of what was expected of her regarding the issues highlighted. This guidance and clarity usually comes from her HOD after the staff meetings. On the other hand an experienced teacher found that she valued staff meetings as it offered her an opportunity to express her concerns regarding issues in the school and she was grateful that management, in such interactions also makes provision for teachers' viewpoints. The collaboration that happens here helps to extend teacher knowledge.

5.4.4. A SUPPORTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM

As mentioned above the management team of the case study school is supportive in that it takes cognisance of staff input. Further, management encourages teachers to network with teachers from other schools for support in areas of the curriculum they find challenging. Teachers said that often HoDs also consult with other schools for clarity and support for teachers.

Most teachers in the study mentioned the effectiveness of a recent discipline workshop held at the school. This workshop was the initiative of management in the hope of addressing the key discipline issues recurrent in the school. The novice teachers said that apart from exposing them to different classroom management strategies, it was consoling to realise that experienced teachers experienced similar problems in their classrooms. Teachers found the idea of dealing with this issue collectively encouraging because it made them all take ownership of the problem and brainstorm ideas as well as criticise why their existing structures did not work effectively.

All teachers found such workshops useful to their development. They also mentioned the efforts of sub committees, HoDs, DSGs and peers in aiding their development. These efforts are part of the school's management plan to aid teacher development and examples of mostly planned programmes where teachers learn informally.

5.4.5. SUB COMMITTEES

The school has established various sub committees to ensure that policies set by the school are executed fairly and transparently. Some of these committees include: Fincom (Finance), Discipline, Safety and Security committee, Admissions committee, Sport committee,

Maintenance committee. These committees are formed by teachers, management and members of the governing body.

Teachers are encouraged to serve on sub committees where they can learn to develop leadership and organisational skills. Further, it gives teachers insight into how policies are drawn up, what factors impact on their working context, how the working context can be improved etc.

These committees also give teachers the opportunity to learn how a school functions and they gain a louder voice in taking pertinent decisions that impact on the ethos of the school. A novice teacher felt that being part of sub committees not only extended her knowledge but also helped her integrate into the school. She said that it contributed to her confidence being built as being part of these committees helped to establish her as a bona fide member of the school and feel accountable for upholding the school's modus operandi.

5.4.6. CLUSTERING OF SUBJECT CLASSROOMS

The teachers in the school are located such that they are able to liaise with each other easily. The school is divided into subject blocks, thus all teachers of a particular subject are in the same vicinity. This facilitates teachers consulting with each other on teaching issues. All teachers indicated that they frequently liaise with their peers.

It was evident that these teachers' learning was situated in their working context, proving that teaching has a practical bias therefore the execution of their jobs contributes to their development, (Knight, 2002).

5.5. SCHOOL FACTORS THAT HINDER TEACHERS' INFORMAL LEARNING

The teachers in the study seemed to enjoy learning from each other and their experiences of learning indicate that the school supports collaborative learning. However, from the five teachers in the study, only two appeared to be totally satisfied with the way the school deals with teacher learning. Thus, while Ayodhya High supports teachers learning informally, these teachers feel that the effort of the school needs to be extended.

5.5.1. INSUFFICIENT INTERNAL WORKSHOPS

While some teachers are satisfied that the school support their learning, some teachers felt that the school needed to do more.

Novice teachers expressed the need for more development workshops dealing with issues of discipline and handling the curriculum. One novice teacher expressed that one area for development that the school should consider is helping teachers how to assess English formal writing pieces. Experienced teachers also admitted they needed guidance on effective classroom management strategies.

5.5.2. LACK OF ORIENTATION

Three of the five respondents highlighted the need for adequate orientation at school. Both novice teachers pointed out that orientation helps teachers not only develop but integrate into a school. An experienced teacher learnt the value of orientation from his own experience as a new teacher. He now, in his capacity as HOD, pays attention to this area with new teachers in his department. One novice teacher admits that if the orientation she received on her arrival was adequate, she would not have made the mistakes she did.

It was evident that the lack of adequate orientation for novice teachers left them feeling a little out of their depth. Both felt that if they were sufficiently orientated when they first entered the school, they would not have faced as many hiccups during their first year in the school. They displayed a need for administrative contextual knowledge that they say they did not acquire in their formal training but that experienced teachers wrongfully assumed they knew.

A senior teacher expressed a similar sentiment, based on his first experience at a school. While the school makes an attempt to orientate teachers it is not sufficient or intensive enough to equip teachers adequately with knowledge, especially pedagogic knowledge they need to know in order to function effectively at this school.

They revealed that they would have liked orientation regarding how to function as a teacher in the school with regard to teacher administration requirements, record keeping, examination procedures and marking strategies.

Ayodhya High supports informal teacher learning to a large extent, however, there are some areas in which it can improve to create greater opportunities for teachers to learn on site.

As a school, most of the opportunities are planned, example subject committee meetings, staff meetings and internal workshops; however it also facilitates unplanned learning by encouraging teachers to work supportively and collaboratively.

FACTORS THAT SUPPORTED INFORMAL LEARNING	FACTORS THAT HINDERED INFORMAL LEARNING.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject committee meetings. • Internal school- based workshops. • Staff meetings. • A supportive management team. • Sub committee meetings. • Cluster meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient internal workshops for staff. • Lack of orientation for novice teachers into the school.

Table 4: FACTORS THAT SUPPORT/HINDER INFORMAL TEACHER LEARNING

5.6. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

5.6.1 IMPLICATIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING TEACHER LEARNING

Using an adaptation of Reid’s quadrants of learning (Mckinney, 2005 cited in Fraser, 2007) I was able to understand how each of the respondents learnt informally by engaging in different types of learning activities. The narratives explained that activities they engaged in were similar but inspired and motivated by varying factors and at different stages of their development.

The quadrants in the matrix showed that in most cases teachers engaged in unplanned (incidental) which took place mostly socially, ie. by interacting with others. Learning activities in both planned (intentional) quadrants were limited in comparison to the

unplanned (incidental) ones. It was also evident from the matrix that while teachers engaged in individual learning there was a greater tendency for the teachers to engage in learning socially, thus most learning opportunities were reflected in the social/unplanned (incidental) quadrants. This reveals that much of their learning happens incidentally.

All but two of the teachers showed more engagement in individual learning than learning socially. Both of these teachers were experienced teachers.

Interestingly, all teachers showed a very limited engagement with planned (intentional)/social learning opportunities. These activities were almost exclusively limited to school and cluster meetings and workshops. The teachers only mentioned meetings and school based workshops as formal programmes of development therefore it is likely that they are not engaged in structured learning programmes where their learning would centre around formal learning. This in turn implies that most of the teachers' development is happening informally.

There was some variation in the types of activities teachers engaged in, in the planned/individual quadrants. The information in this quadrant showed that the planned/individual learning activities were very teacher specific in that it impacted directly on the individual teacher needs more than those in the planned/social quadrant did.

5.6.2. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

The respondents' learning experiences indicate that much teacher learning is situated. They showed that they engaged in learning both individually, by reading, surfing the internet etc and socially, by engaging with peers, interacting in communities of practice. There is no doubt that these teachers were driven to improve their competences and were not afraid to take the initiative to seek the learning they thought they needed. Their situated learning was not confined to the school. Teachers formed networks with teachers in other schools thereby increasing their potential to learn because they are exposed to more experiences and beliefs which invariably impacts on learning. Teachers also seemed to show a great awareness of their practice as they all highlighted the need to reflect on their lessons they taught and seek feedback from their learners. This tells us that these teachers are intent on improving their practice. The data showed that the area in which novice teachers needed

most development was in classroom management and administrative duties. The experienced teachers, while appearing to cope well in these areas, sought development to improve their knowledge and keep up to date with current trends. Further, their interactions with other experienced teachers in the communities of practice helped in their development.

This study has highlighted that teacher learning is indeed situated in this case study school. It also revealed that teachers learn both socially and individually. Learning socially entailed teachers learning in communities of practice or by interacting with their colleagues in various ways. Learning opportunities were found to be embedded in various ways both within the school and outside. This means that the teachers' learning was not confined to the school. It was found that teachers engaged in both planned and unplanned forms of informal learning with greater emphasis on unplanned or incidental/spontaneous learning. The preferred interaction among teachers appeared to be informal chats in different spaces in the school. Judging from the fact that even teachers with long service in the profession indicated that they continue to learn in their jobs, teachers are lifelong learners.

Currently stakeholders in education in South Africa are taking cognisance of what researchers are saying about the ways in which teachers learn. They have designed a new plan for teacher development called Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa (2011-2025) (Departments of Basic Education and Training, 2011). This plan realises the need to improve teacher education and development as it impacts positively on teacher practice. As researchers recommend, teachers are encouraged to take ownership of their development by identifying their needs and engaging in teacher development activities.

It is refreshing to note that this document makes reference to activities that are linked to qualifications and those that are not. This implies that informal learning activities are also being acknowledged as authentic forms of learning.

The document further proposes the formation of Professional Learning Communities (PLC), however, this comes across rather autocratically as the establishment and control of these PLC's lie with the Provincial Education Departments. This does not place teachers at the core

of their development and ignores the findings in research that show that teachers' needs and development vary therefore there is no 'one size fits all' teacher development programme. Knight (2002) and Kwakman (2003) contend that communities of practice are established by teachers themselves and that the learning that happens here emanates from the teachers who bring their own beliefs, experiences and knowledges that shape the learning that happens in these communities. Further, the learning is incidental and spontaneous and morphed into new learning when combined with knowledge and experiences of others. Research therefore suggests that communities of practice should be created by teachers. This study indicated that teacher learning is teacher driven and situated in the working context; therefore all teachers should be encouraged to engage in learning opportunities. Further, the study noted that teachers engage in various forms of informal learning both at school and outside school; the most popular form, being in learning communities. Thus I believe that this document needs to take cognisance of the need for learning communities being established and sustained by teachers themselves. Further, the matrices of all teachers in the study showed that teachers prefer engaging in unplanned- social or unplanned-individual learning. Planned informal opportunities are few in the school but some teachers indicated that they also find such opportunities useful. Therefore, the powers that be should consult with teachers on the ground for a more realistic perception of how teachers learn and what opportunities schools can offer for teacher development. The advantage of the plan acknowledging that teachers learn in communities is that it recognises that teacher learning is largely social.

A pleasing point that this document pays attention to is the factoring in of time for teacher development. It considers options such as releasing teachers to attend CPD programmes by replacing them with student teachers as is done in some countries abroad and scheduling in development programmes in the school schedule.

While the plan pays attention to creating learning opportunities both formally and informally in schools, it does not totally embrace the potential of teacher driven incentives for the enhancement of teacher development in South African schools. Perhaps this outlook stimulates an urgent focus on teacher driven initiatives in future South African research.

5.7. CONCLUSION

In this study I have explored how teachers learnt informally in their workplace and how this learning has contributed to their professional development. I also considered the factors that support/hinder teacher learning at school.

The case of teacher learning was made explicit by the five units of analysis made up by the five respondents. The data made available through multiple sources provided an in depth account of how the respondents engaged in various forms of informal learning.

The journals gave “real life” accounts of the respondents’ experiences in learning opportunities, while the photographs were given personal meaning by each of the respondents in the photo voice interviews.

The plotting of learning activities extracted from the data on a matrix adapted from Reid’s model of informal learning (Mckinney, 2005 cited in Fraser, 2007) revealed that teachers do in fact engage in various forms of learning activities at this school. It was clear that both formal and informal learning activities contributed to the teachers’ development. The matrix was instrumental in highlighting the degree to which informal learning contributed towards teacher learning and development. The matrix revealed that teachers at school engage in both planned and unplanned learning activities and the engagement in these activities can be individual or social or both.

The respective narratives provided an overview of each teacher’s learning and reflected their individual understanding of teacher learning. By keeping journals the teachers were able to critically explore their own learning and document how their learning unfolded. The capturing of their learning spaces in photographs helped to illustrate the various ways in which teachers engage in learning.

Based on the outcome of this study it is suggested that cognizance be taken of the powerful learning potential that sits latent within informal learning activities on site. The study also revealed the merits of teachers’ engagement and interaction with each other in supporting and enhancing teacher learning. It also found that it is important for schools to be supportive learning sites.

It is hoped that the findings in this study contribute to future work in this field in the endeavour to bring more light to informal teacher learning in South African schools.

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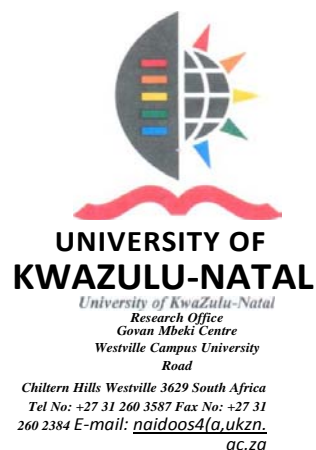
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APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



09 July 2010 Dr C A Bertram
School of Education and Development Faculty of Education PIETERMARITZBURG
CAMPUS

Dear Dr Bertram

PROTOCOL: Teacher learning in schools: some school case studies
**ETHICAL APPROVAL NUMBER: HSS/0465/2010 M: Faculty of Education and
Development**

In response to your application dated 30 June 2010, Staff Number: **409420** the
Humanities & Social Sciences Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned
application and the protocol has been given **FULL APPROVAL**.

**PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for
a period of 5 years.**

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Professor Steve Collings (Chair)
HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES ETHICS COMMITTEE

SC/sn

cc: C Thomson (Supervisor)

cc: Ms T Khumalo

Postal Address:

Telephone:

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Founding Campuses:

Edgewood

Howard College

Medical School

M Pietermaritzburg

wm Westville



27 July 2010

Dear Mr Pillay

M.Ed research project on Informal Teacher Learning

Mrs Sharmaine Prammoney is a Masters student at the Faculty of Education, and is embarking on a research project to understand the nature of informal teacher learning within the school setting. This letter explains the purpose of the study, and requests your permission for her to conduct the study at the school.

The purpose of the project is to explore and describe the concept of teacher learning in schools. She is planning to work with five teachers at the school and to describe the ways in which these teachers learn informally in the school. The study aims to find out from teachers how they understand the kinds of professional development and learning that happens within their school context. It also aims to describe the kind of school environments that support or hinder teacher learning. The project has received ethical clearance from the University's Ethical Clearance Committee.

I am the supervisor of Mrs Prammoney and should you want any more information on this study, please contact me on 033 260 5349/ 084 4079827.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carol Bertram'.

Dr Carol Bertram
Senior Lecturer
School of Education and Development
Faculty of Education, Pietermaritzburg

APPENDIX C: LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS



27 July 2010

Dear Participants

M.Ed research project on Informal Teacher Learning

Mrs Sharmaine Prammoney is a Masters student at the Faculty of Education, and is embarking on a research project to understand the nature of informal teacher learning within the school setting. This letter explains the purpose of the study at school.

The purpose of the project is to explore and describe the concept of teacher learning in schools. She is planning to work with five teachers at the school and to describe the ways in which these teachers learn informally in the school. The study aims to find out from teachers how they understand the kinds of professional development and learning that happens within their school context. It also aims to describe the kind of school environments that support or hinder teacher learning. The project has received ethical clearance from the University's Ethical Clearance Committee.

I am the supervisor of Mrs Prammoney and should you want any more information on this study, please contact me on 033 260 5349/ 084 4079827.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carol Bertram".

Dr Carol Bertram
Senior Lecturer
School of Education and Development
Faculty of Education, Pietermaritzburg

June 2010 Dear participant

Study on teacher learning in schools

The purpose of the project is to explore and describe the concept of teacher learning in schools. The study aims to find out from teachers how they understand the kinds of professional development and learning that happens within their school context. It also aims to describe the kind of school environments that support or hinder teacher learning.

The researchers are M.Ed students who are supervised by Dr Carol Bertram (033 260 5349/ 084 4079827) or Dr Carol Thomson (033 260 5567/084 4003354) from the School of Education and Development, Faculty of Education, Pietermaritzburg, UKZN.

Each student researcher has identified some teachers in a school who may be willing to participate in the study. Each participant will be interviewed twice (with an interval of three to four months) and will need to write a personal journal in which they describe particular incidents that they feel has lead to their learning and development. They will write at least twice a week for four weeks. The student researcher will also observe possible opportunities for teacher learning (eg,. In subject meetings, during tea breaks, 'corridor talk' etc) and take field notes where appropriate.

Interviews will be audio recorded and then transcribed. All transcriptions and journal entries will be analysed by the researchers, and written up as a M.Ed thesis and possibly academic journal articles. Names of participants and schools will be anonymised. All data will be stored safely with the project leaders at the university and destroyed within 5 years,

Any participant who chooses to withdraw from the study at any time will not result in any disadvantage. Participation is voluntary.

Yours sincerely

Carol Bertram (PhD) and Carol Thomson (PhD) Project Leaders.

I (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

CASE STUDIES TEACHER LEARNING: 2010 – 2012

JOURNAL ENTRIES

Background to the journal

This is your book to use to write about the way in which you think about and experience your own development and learning. We have given some questions for each entry to get you started. If you want to write about other things, you are welcome to! Please be as honest as you can – no one but the researcher will read this entries, and they will be treated completely confidentially.

Journal entry 1(2-6 Aug)

Write about the kinds of learning you experienced since you started teaching.

Journal entry 2 (10 – 13 Aug)

What do you understand by the concept “teacher learning”? Where do you think you learn most effectively? What kinds of places/ spaces/ people help you to learn professionally?

Journal entry 3 (16 -20 Aug)

Reflect on your learning during this week. If possible, describe each of following:

- Describe an incident where you learnt new content knowledge. Why did you have to learn new content? How did you learn it? From whom did you learn it?
- Describe a incident where you learnt a new teaching or assessment strategy. How did you learn this? From whom? In what context?

- Describe an incident where you learnt a new classroom management strategy. How did you learn this? From whom? In what context?

Journal entry 4 (23 – 27 Aug)

1. What is the main area that you feel that you need to develop or change as a teacher?
2. Do you have any ideas of how that development may take place? (for example, will you do something like meeting with colleagues, are you waiting for some kind of workshop to attend etc?)

Journal entry 5 (30 Aug – 3 Sept)

1. To what extent would you say that you are part of a supportive group of colleagues that support your learning and development?
2. If yes, what is the nature of this group? Who are these colleagues? What supports your learning?
If not, do you think that a group would support your professional development? Why or why not?

Journal entry 6 (6 Sept – 10 Sept)

Reflect on your learning during this week. If possible, describe each of following:

- Describe an incident where you learnt new content knowledge. Why did you have to learn new content? How did you learn it? From whom did you learn it?
- Describe an incident where you learnt a new teaching or assessment strategy. How did you learn this? From whom? In what context?
- Describe an incident where you learnt a new classroom management strategy. How did you learn this? From whom? In what context?

Journal entry 7 (13 Sept- 17Sept)

1. How would you describe a good teacher in your subject?

2. Describe how you have learnt to be proficient in your subject in your career thus far.

Pay attention to how you developed your skills, knowledge attitudes and values.

*Describe how you are learning to become proficient in your subject so far. Pay attention to how you developed your skills, knowledge attitudes and values.

(novice)

3. Describe how you have developed your skills, values, attitude and knowledge to become proficient in your subject thus far.

*Describe how you are developing your skills, knowledge, attitude and knowledge to become proficient in your subject. (novice)

Journal entry 8 (27 Sept – 1 Oct)

1. Do you feel that this school needs to do more to support your learning? If yes, what do you recommend to be put in place that would aid your development? If no, how is the school succeeding supporting your learning?

2. Do you think that the school leadership is supportive of teacher learning? Why do you say this?

3. How would you describe the working ethos between experienced and novice teachers in this school?

Journal entry 9 (4 Oct- 8 Oct)

1. Is there a clear programme to address professional development needs? Tell me about the professional development policy at this school.
2. Which form of professional development do you prefer – the formal, workshop approach or the informal, learning on the job approach? Explain your preference and the reasons for your choice in detail.
3. What have you learnt about your own processes of learning as a teacher as a result of this study?