Teachers As Inquirers: Exploring An Alternative Model of Professional Development in Bahrain

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We accept this thesis as conforming to the standard

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Abstract

This study is a qualitative case study, which explored the value of teacher research as an approach to teachers' in-service development in one of the girls' secondary schools in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The transcriptions of the participants' group meeting, interviews, written responses to a questionnaire and documents from students formed sources of data which were gathered over a period of one academic school year.

Three research questions were addressed in the study: 1) How is teacher research conceptualized and enacted by a group of Bahraini English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers over a course of one-year, self-directed professional development program? 2) How does teacher research from the perspective of the EFL study group contribute to development of individual teacher's classroom practices? and 3) What is the impact of teacher research from the perspective of the EFL study group on students' learning?

The analysis of data revealed a number of insights as a result of implementing an inquiry approach into practice. The teachers in this study validated the notion that as professionals, teachers are capable of directing their own professional development and contributing to the production of knowledge about this process. The case study further demonstrated the complexities associated with the process of engaging in inquiry especially in contexts where such practices are not the norm or might even not be valued.

The insights gained from this case are significant and inform teacher educators of the important role practitioners can play in bringing about change into their teaching and improving educational practices. These insights would therefore necessitate the re-examination of the way teacher development is conducted in Bahrain. Moreover, it creates the need for providing the opportunity for the inclusion of the voices of those teachers who have explored alternative approaches to in-service development and have generated knowledge about this process. Drawing upon the experiences and knowledge of these teachers would contribute in portraying a different image of teachers- as -professionals in Bahrain and inform the educational community of their significant contributions in educational reform.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

I. The Problem:

Teacher educators in the last decade or so have reached a new realization on the role that practitioners play in their learning and professional development. In fact, teachers as professionals have always been involved in developing and improving their practice not only in institutional settings but also as independent and self-directed learners. The above realization is related to the fact that teachers occupy a significant role in bringing about educational change and improvement (Fullan, 1991; Wells, 1994 & Lieberman, 1996; Sparks, 2002). Continuing professional development is no longer viewed as a matter of in-service courses or workshops that were traditionally offered to teachers. Currently, teacher educators have a different conception of professional development. Continuous teacher development is now seen as a necessity for teachers to cope with the challenges of the rapidly growing society. New demands and responsibilities have placed practitioners in the center of educational reform. To cope with these challenges, teachers are being asked to adopt a different role in their own learning and in generating knowledge about their practice. To fulfill this role, teacher research has become a popular mode of inquiry during the last ten years and more and more teachers are now encouraged to investigate and improve their practice.

The current interest in teacher research as an alternative mode of professional development is based on the realization that the traditional top-down approaches of conducting staff development not only have limited desirable consequences on altering
teachers' practices but have also contributed negatively in portraying how practitioners learn within the school context (Little, 1993; Fullan, 1995; Cole & Knowles, 1993; Cole & Theissen, 1993; Jungck, 1996; Madbooli, 2002). The failure of many top-down models of professional development is largely related to an assumption made concerning teacher learning and professionalism. The dominant assumption was that teachers are incapable of producing knowledge on their own, and therefore need to rely upon the knowledge produced by the experts and outside researchers. This reliance on knowledge produced by outsiders has marginalized teachers' knowledge and has come to limit, rather than to expand, the community of researchers and thus the forms of knowledge that are generated in the field of teacher education (Jungck, 1996). Moreover, this assumption has contributed to the theory-practice gap and supports the myth that theory and practice are separate endeavors.

Recently, however, teachers have begun to assume a different position in the inquiry process. Many teachers in different parts of the world such as Europe, Australia, and North America have been conducting research to investigate their practice and generating knowledge about it.

II. The Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of teacher research as an alternative means of professional development in the Kingdom of Bahrain. It is a qualitative case study of a group of teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) conducting research on their own practice and how they conceptualize it as a method for continuous learning. The roles and value of this type of teacher research are evident in public forums and recent texts. For example, the International Conference on Teacher Research attracts teacher researchers from around the world and is now in its 10th year (Clarke & Erickson, 2003). Another example is

III. The Need For The Study: What Brings Me Into Teacher Research

In Bahrain, the teachers' in-service education is provided by either the Directorate of Training or by the curriculum specialists from the Directorate of Curricula. The ministry advisors (or curriculum specialists) usually visit schools and observe teachers in their classrooms for evaluation purposes and to provide necessary consultations. Based on these observations, the advisors usually conduct workshops or seminars designed to address certain deficiencies that are noticed in teachers' performances. The forms of teacher development programs offered by the Directorate of Training are similarly organized by individuals in the department or sometimes by educators from the University of Bahrain. In general, the type and the purposes of the workshops or the training programs vary and could be classified in the following manner:

1. **Induction Workshops:**

   These are workshops or seminars that are specifically designed for the new teachers who have recently joined the profession. These workshops are usually of short duration (3-5 days) and their content mainly focuses upon teaching methods.

2. **Certification Workshops:**

   These consist of two types of special training courses that are normally offered by the Directorate of Training to EFL teachers at various levels. The first type of courses are English language courses at FCE (First Certificate in English) or CAE (Cambridge Advanced English) level and are usually designed for teachers who do not pass the special
tests that are occasionally prepared by the Directorate of Training to assess teachers' subject (disciplinary) knowledge. The other types of training workshops are designed specifically for the senior teachers and usually focus on methodology of teaching a foreign language.

3. General Workshops:

These are workshops and seminars designed for all EFL teachers, and in this case attendance is compulsory especially when the ministry invites university scholars from abroad or in conjunction with the British Council in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The main focus of the professional development activities currently offered to Bahraini teachers is on improving their subject knowledge, which in the case of EFL might be justifiable to the ministry given the fact that all English language teachers are non-native speakers of English. Yet, the fact remains that workshops and seminars are the only form of staff development activities available to in-service teachers. As will be discussed later, from the perspective of many Bahraini teachers, these top down models have neither been considered desirable nor profitable in bringing about significant changes in their practice.

Unfortunately, until recently, the Directorate of Training had not conducted any research to assess the impact of these activities and evaluate the professional development programs offered to in-service teachers. However, at the Centre for Educational Research and Development, AL Nahar (2001) conducted a study, which evaluated the effectiveness of in-service programs offered to the teachers of the Arabic language, science and English as a Foreign Language. In the case of EFL teachers, the study focussed on evaluating the language courses offered and revealed that teachers in general found these courses valuable in helping them improve their level of English but did not cater for their actual
needs to help them develop their teaching practices. At the time this study was conducted, no official documentation was available to assess the impact of in-service courses offered by the ministry. Therefore, to clarify the need for this study in the Bahraini context, I relied on my personal experience in teaching and professional development and on teachers' feedback.

IV. Personal Background to the Study

I started teaching English as a foreign language in Bahrain in 1982. In 1989, I was promoted to the position of senior teacher after I obtained my master's degree in Education. In addition to my regular teaching duties, this new post required managing a staff of 10-12 teachers. The new responsibilities included supervising the teachers as well as taking care of other school activities. As a novice senior teacher, I started experimenting with a number of different approaches to help the staff become involved in their professional development. I started with designing and conducting workshops, training courses and lectures based on my belief that teachers needed to be taught how to handle their classroom problems and, in return, I expected them to change their practice. I became very frustrated during my classroom visits when I noticed that some teachers 'resisted' any changes in their teaching. I also worked with the Directorate of Curricula at the Ministry of Education and in conjunction with the curriculum specialist. We organized workshops and training courses that were geared toward improving teachers' pedagogical and technical knowledge. It was during those training sessions that I had the opportunity to work closely with more teachers from various schools. Upon reflection, I recall the lengthy discussions we used to have concerning their comments on the limitations of the
workshops offered by the ministry. Some of the responses were “you don’t know my students or my classroom. This will never work for them”, or “we already know all this, we don’t need to be taught how to teach our students.” I usually felt very disturbed by such comments, which to me were simply teachers’ negativism or basically excuses for not wanting to alter their practices. As I gained more experience in working with Bahraini teachers, I became aware that not all teachers are necessarily resistant to change. Perhaps, as teacher educators, we need to think more in terms of how these teachers perceive their learning and professional development and give them the opportunity to become more involved in the process. The reason why teachers do not change their practice is not because they are incapable or unwilling to do so, but as Fullan (1991) argues convincingly, the one-shot workshops and training courses do not necessarily provide conditions for teacher learning and professional growth.

As a result of my experiences described above, I became interested in exploring alternative means of conducting professional development activities and started my graduate studies with a belief that it is only through teachers involvement in the professional development process that they will have a voice and be actively engaged in the process. After extensive reading in the literature on teacher education during my graduate studies, I became familiar with the concept of teachers-as-researchers as an alternative mode of teacher learning. Initially, I was slightly skeptical as to whether this type of inquiry would be acceptable to Bahraini teachers. However, after sharing my interest with some colleagues in Bahrain, they supported this project and showed a willingness to participate in it. I hoped that through exploring the process of teacher learning through teacher research, the knowledge generated by the participating teachers
would inform not only themselves and other practitioners in the field, but also provide the incentive for teacher educators in Bahrain to review and rethink issues related to teachers in-service development.

V. The Research Questions

The purpose of study is to describe and analyze the process of learning and professional development of a group of Bahraini EFL teachers who engaged in teacher research as an approach to improve their practice. The main focus will be on the process of enacting teacher research and its contribution in bringing about change in teaching practices of teacher researchers. Thus, the first two research questions focus on the process of learning within the context of inquiring into practice.

1. How is teacher research conceptualized and enacted by a group of Bahraini EFL teachers over a course of one-year self-directed professional-development program?
2. How does teacher research from the perspective of the EFL study group contribute to the development of individual teacher’s classroom practices?

There is a significant body of literature on teacher research that documents how practitioners learn and alter their practices as a result of engaging in systematic inquiry. However, much of this literature does not examine the impact of teacher research on students’ learning. I believe this area of research is significant because it sheds light on the effectiveness of teacher research not only for teachers but also adds to the strength and credibility of this mode of inquiry as a vehicle for improving the learning conditions for both
teachers and their students. In the light of this, a third research question investigated student learning, and that is:

3. What is the impact of teacher research from the perspective of the EFL study group on students' learning?

VI. Research method and design

This study documents the process of teacher learning in the context of self-initiated professional development activity. Teacher research as a mode of inquiry was conducted by the participants as an alternative approach to teachers' professional development. To provide a rich description of such process, it was necessary to adopt a qualitative mode of inquiry and draw data from a number sources. These data included 1) individual interviews with the participants at the start and at the end of the project, 2) audio recordings of the teachers' group conversations during their regular meetings, 3) written responses to an open-ended questionnaire obtained from the participants regarding certain issues at the end of the school year, 4) documents provided by the participants concerning student learning and 5) the investigator's own reflective journal. The length of the project was one full academic year; that is, from September 1996 to September 1997. The second teacher interview was conducted at the beginning of the second academic year, that is September 1997.

Data analysis was a continuous process through out the research project. I looked at the data gathered in this study for emerging themes as evidence of teacher learning and professional growth. In my analysis throughout the study, I have attempted to explore and identify themes related to:
1. Social issues, such as the impact of collaborative conversations and inquiries upon teachers' professional development and learning.

2. The different aspects of teacher professional development as evidenced in the data.

3. Issues related to factors that facilitate or hinder teachers' efforts to conduct teacher research.

4. The impact of teacher research upon students' learning.

   During phase 1 of the study, the participants were given the opportunity to take part in reviewing some of the available data such as transcriptions of the first teachers' interviews as a member check technique. The transcripts of the first teacher interviews were shared with the participants for member check and further clarification or comments. This process was significant because it aimed at presenting a joint construction of meaning.

VII. Organizations of the chapters:

This thesis consists of eight chapters. The first chapter presents an introduction to the study. Chapters two, three and four provide the theoretical and methodological foundation upon which this study was based. Then the analysis chapters that follow (chapters 5, 6, and 7) represent how teacher research was enacted and how it contributed to the teachers' professional growth. These chapters further explore issues related to introducing and managing innovation, and the impact of teacher inquiry on teacher development as well as students' learning from the perspective of teacher researchers. Finally, chapter eight revisits the research questions, examines the implication of this study to the teacher in-service development in Bahrain and discusses the need for establishing a context where teacher research is facilitated and enhanced as an alternative model of professional development.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to draw upon the literature that has shaped the study. These are the literature on teachers’ professional development, a constructivist view of learning and the reflective rationality. In the first section, I will discuss issues related to teacher development such as, the concerns for teachers’ professional development and explore the role of teachers and how it is conceptualized among educators. Then, I will discuss some views about teacher learning and knowledge as held by various educators in the field subsumed under the label of constructivist learning theory. Following this, a discussion of different professional development models will be provided along with the strengths and limitations of each model. In the next chapter, I will argue for the provision of the teacher research as a model of professional development to bring about favorable changes in the teaching profession. Using some evidence from the literature, I will discuss some of the criticisms raised against teacher research and conclude with a proposal for adopting teacher research as a suitable model of teachers’ in-service development.

I. Professional development: A Definition

Teachers’ professional development has recently received considerable attention among teacher educators and educational researchers (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Nowlan, 2001; Sparks, 2002). One of the main reasons behind this renewed interest in teacher development is the agreement among most educators that professional development is the primary vehicle in bringing about educational reform and the recognition that teachers play a crucial role in
this process (Fullan 1991; Imants et al., 1993; Lieberman, 1996; Sparks 2002). Teacher educators argue that, in order to meet the goals of reform, teachers must make changes that entail much more than simply learning new teaching techniques or updating their skills but also to significantly alter their role as teachers. Professional development, as a tool, is thought to provide opportunities that enable teachers to transform their practices. The nature of these opportunities for teachers depends largely on how professional development is perceived by the entire educational community (Sparks, 2002).

The term professional development has been traditionally used to refer to “any formal and systematic attempt to alter the professional practices, beliefs and understanding of school persons toward an articulated end” (Griffin, 1983, p.2). A more recent definition is provided by Clement and Staessens (1993), places the teacher in the center of the whole process of learning and development. To them, professional development refers to “a set of formal and informal learning experiences that teachers accumulate throughout their professional life” (p.133). Most professional development programs have a common goal, that is, to advance teachers’ knowledge, skills and understandings in such a way that lead to changes in their thinking, classroom behavior and eventually the improvement of student learning.

Unfortunately, professional development efforts in schools have not always been successful in bringing about change in teachers’ practices (Guskey, 1989; Richardson and Hamilton, 1994; Jungck, 1996; Acker, 1999; Dadd, 2001; Sparks 2002). According to Diamond (1991), many recent studies on the impact of in-service education for teachers reveal that the “process has rarely produced positive outcome” (p.46). In my view, the reason is related to how educators conceptualize teachers’ role and thus view the process of teacher learning and development. Below these issues are dealt with in detail.
II. Concerns about Teachers Professional Development

Teachers are subject to great pressure to extend and develop their profession in order to meet the demands of the rapidly changing society. The concern for teachers' continuous development emanates from a number of challenges facing teachers. Some of the challenges derive from parents and guardians who have a say in evaluating innovations that affect the learning experiences of their children. Other challenges come from people in government, policy makers and school administrators. As Little (1993) contends, despite its profoundly personal character, the schoolteacher nonetheless remains a member of an institution, an employee of districts and schools. These institutions have a stake in the professional development of teachers. The institutional purpose of teachers' professional development is related to the collective competence of a faculty and to the school's capacity for continuous improvement. Teachers, themselves, also have concerns about their professional improvement in providing more effective education for their students. Moreover, some challenges also derive from students. The student populations that teachers work with are diverse and have complex learning needs. Bell and Gilbert (1996) argue that, students in many societies do not have a significant formal voice; they, however, have their own agenda and thus create demands on teachers to improve their teaching.

These concerns lead us to think carefully about the nature of professional development activities and how successful they are in promoting or hindering teachers' professional growth. These issues will be dealt with later in my discussion of the different approaches to teacher development. In the section that follows, I will discuss how the professional development of teachers is conceptualized differently among teacher educators. These differences are attributed to a number of assumptions that are made about the role of teachers,
of learning and development, of context in teacher learning and of knowledge sources for teaching.

III. The Role of the Teachers

The dominant concept of schooling in many societies appears to be a bureaucratic conception that views teachers as technicians (Hyde & Pink, 1992; Darling Hammond, 1994; Posch, 1992). According to this view of schooling, the major goal of professional development programs is to increase the technical competence of teachers. As Hargreaves (1995) further explains, teaching is seen as a matter of teachers mastering the skills of teaching and the knowledge of what to teach and how to teach it. Professional development here is seen to be about knowledge and skill development. Moreover, teaching has been described as a technical set of skills that practitioners need to master in order to teach effectively, and implement a curriculum devised by others. This dominant view assumes that ‘good practice’ will come about from those outside schools making judgments for and on behalf of those inside schools, a view which leaves little or no room for invention and building of craft knowledge (Kincheloe, 1991; Posch, 1992; Lieberman 1996; Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Dadd, 2001).

Darling Hammond (1994) further explains that according to this bureaucratic perspective, the key to educational improvement is the correct definition of the procedures for teachers to follow rather than the development of their capacities to be able to make complex judgments based on their own understanding of their students and the subject matter. In addition, many of the teaching decisions are top-down and are usually handed down to teachers for implementation. Accordingly, teachers need not be experts but rather remain disempowered to ensure the exact implementation of prescribed teaching procedures. In this case, problems
of practice do not exist but the real problems are mainly teachers' failures to properly implement programs designed for them (Sprinthall et. al., 1996; Smyth, 1991; Wideen, 1987; Darling- Hammond, 1994). Along the same line, I would argue that the persistence of this technical view also has a political dimension. In some countries, which are characterized by the absence of democracy, there has been a deliberate policy in the educational system to keep teachers in a subservient position. Accountability is given to outside constituencies (i.e. supervisors in the ministry, university educators) who assume the role of experts and tell the teachers how to do their job 'better'.

The above view of teaching as a technical act has prevailed for such a long time and many of the conventional staff development programs seem to adopt a philosophy which recognizes teachers mainly as appliers of a craft and as passive learners who are incapable of determining what and how they should develop. As professionals therefore, they constantly need outside experts who organize sessions and workshops, usually outside the school context (Thiessen, 1992). Recently, however, the above perspective of the teacher-as-technician or what Dadd (2001) calls, uncritical implementers of outside policies has been widely attacked by a number of prominent researchers and educators in the field of teacher education. Today, the literature on teachers' professional development reflects a different view of the role that teachers play if school improvement is aimed to be successful. There is a considerable emphasis on the significant contribution of teachers as agents of educational reform (Fullan, 1991; Kincheloe, 1991; Hargreaves, 1993; Smyth, 1995; Northfield, 1996; Young, 2000). The current reform agenda requires not only mastery of technical skills but also more importantly, that teachers reconceptualize the nature of their teaching practice. Teaching, as Nelson and Hammerman (1996), maintain should become an intellectual
endeavor in which teachers inquire deeply into the nature of knowing rather than a technical craft. Below, I will discuss a view about teachers' learning and its influence upon the professional development of teachers.

IV. A View about Teacher Learning

Many have looked at teacher learning as an example of adult learning in general. The difference, however, is that teachers have been engaged in far more deliberate learning and teaching than most people. Knowles (1984) sees adult learning as distinct from child learning. His model of adult learning is based on a number of assumptions. First, he assumes that adults need to know the purposes for which they are learning something before they actually engage in such a process. Second, adults are accustomed to make their own decisions in their every day life. Therefore, they learn better if they have greater control over the process of learning. Moreover, both students and adults learn best when addressing tasks and problems, which they believe to be real and which are relevant to their daily practice. Knowles' (1989) distinction however, fails to take into consideration the vast experiences that adults bring to a learning situation. These experiences, Bell and Gilbert (1996) argue, should be acknowledged and drawn upon if successful leaning is to take place. Earlier in his experiential model, Dewey (1938) explained that learning begins when an individual is confronted with a dilemma or a difficulty. The individual then defines the problem and analyzes the alternative solutions. The analysis involves the decision to either act or not to act on a particular solution. This view has been further elaborated by Donald Schon (1987), who contends that learning takes place under conditions of surprise or non-routine circumstances that require heightened attention, experimentation and determination of the source problem. Learning, as Schon (1983, 1987) explains, occurs as individuals confront and alter taken-for
granted assumptions to reframe problem situations. I will discuss Schon’s account in greater detail below.

V. The Reflective Rationality

To view teachers as professionals, capable of engaging in a life long process of professional development to address the challenges they face, requires that teacher learning be given a high priority. The metaphor needed to underpin such learning is teachers as critical or reflective practitioners (Schon, 1983, 1987). The notion of teacher as a critical inquirer is best approached through a consideration of a reflective practitioner, a concept that has received a considerable attention in teacher education as a result of the writings of Donald Schon who popularized this concept.

The notion of ‘reflective practitioner’ has gained prominence as a reaction against the traditional approaches of teacher learning which required practitioners to learn theoretical knowledge, and then apply that knowledge in the practice setting. This sequence formed the basis of what has been referred to as ‘technical rationality’ (Schon, 1983). Reflective rationality, in contrast, is based upon different assumptions about teacher learning. These assumptions are summarized by Altrichter, Posch and Somekh (1993, p. 202):

1. Complex practical problems require specific solutions.
2. These solutions are only developed by practitioners inside the context in which they occur.
3. The solutions cannot be successfully applied to other contexts but can be made accessible to other practitioners in the field.

I find the concept of teacher as a reflective practitioner congruent with the purpose and focus of this study. That is, to understand how a small community of teacher researchers
negotiate the process of learning, adapt to change and develop their teaching by reflecting on
their practice. Unlike the traditional approaches of staff development, which view teacher
change as a necessity in response to certain deficiencies in teachers’ performances, a view of
professional change that is portrayed in teacher research is based on the fact that change and
improvement are an inevitable part of being a reflective practitioner. To understand
professional change in terms of reflective rationality, we need to understand what
professionals do in their actual practice. According to Schon (1983, 1987), when practitioners
are actually practicing a profession, they display what he calls knowledge-in-action,
reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Knowledge-in-action is exhibited in judgments
and recognition that an individual uses spontaneously in his or her practice and usually does
not need to think about them during or prior to the actual action. The individual is usually
unaware of having learned how to do things and simply carries them out without being able
to give a verbal description of his or her action. These actions, however, reflect a certain type
of knowledge, which is tacit and is significant and should be made explicit by practitioners.

Reflection-in-action involves the exercise of analysis, judgment and action in complex
situations (an action is generated and tested through on the spot experimentation). According
to Schon, reflection-in-action only occurs in situations where the action yields unexpected
consequences and is not part of actions that go according to plan. Reflection-on-action, on the
other hand, is a form of reflection that occurs after action. In other words, the practitioners
distance themselves from the action and reflect upon it. I find this type of reflective action
quite significant as it allows teachers time to formulate knowledge explicitly and verbally.
Moreover, it has been one of the main features of the group discussions that the teacher-
researchers in the proposed study have been engaged in. As a group, their reflective
conversations should enable the teachers to make their knowledge explicit and communicable. The ability to communicate knowledge through words is an important part of a critical discussion. As Altrichter et al. (1993) assert, to cope with difficult practical problems, to take control of our practice so that it can be changed as professionals, we need to be involved in reflection-on-action and to be able to articulate that action to make tacitly held knowledge available for scrutiny.

The development of reflective and critical inquiry is fundamental in the teacher-research movement, which aims at empowering practitioners by helping them develop their ability to critique and act in the social and political contexts in which they teach. I believe, one way to achieve this is by creating conditions where teachers conduct inquiries, collaborate with each other and form group conversations in which they communicate their professional knowledge and make it explicit and share it with other practitioners. Although each teacher, as a professional, has some degree of responsibility in the change process, I concur with Bell and Gilbert (1996) in accepting that an individual teacher has a limited power to change the culture and socially constructed knowledge. It is unrealistic to expect teachers to change their classroom practices, values or thinking in a major way individually and on their own. Collaborative inquiries on the other hand might be more powerful in bringing about change and development in the culture of teaching and school. These views of learning reflect a constructivist perspective, which has greatly influenced educational thought in recent years, and in particular has had a great impact on the way both student and teacher learning is conceptualized.
VI. A Constructivist View of Learning

A key element of a constructivist perspective is that knowledge is created and constructed by the individual. As Driver, Asoko, Leach, Mortimer and Scott (1994) assert, knowledge is not something in the world to be discovered. Rather, individuals construct mental representations of phenomena and these mental constructions are constrained by how the world is. Constructivism recognizes that there are multiple apprehensible and conflicting social realities, which are the product of human intellects. These social realities may change as their constructors become more informed and sophisticated (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110).

Constructivism is a heterogeneous movement, with many versions and traditions. For instance, Bell and Gilbert (1996, p.44-49) identify and discuss five major versions of constructivism. These are: Piagetian approach, Kelley’s personal construct approach, Osborne and Wittrock’s personal constructivism, Von Glaserfield’s radical constructivism and social constructivism. Piaget’s cognitive model assumes that an individual comes to understand the world as it is; that is, an individual comes to know reality in order to adopt it. Kelly proposed that each person constructs a representational model of the world, composed of a series of interrelated personal constructs, or tentative hypothesis about the world with which past experience is described and explained, and future events are forecast. Kelly’s constructivism is social in that as a clinical psychologist, he was concerned with the relationships between people and especially how each individual constructed them. However, both Piaget and Kelly’s accounts focus upon individual and the personal construction of
meaning. Critics have argued that these forms of constructivism over-emphasize the individual too much and ignore the social context in which learning takes place.

von Glaserfield’s approach is known as radical constructivism and is based on four percepts. The first is related to the notion of our ability to know reality in an absolute way. According to von Glaserfield (1992), radical constructivism is ontologically neutral and is consistent with the idea of a real world outside and denies the possibility of any certain knowledge of that reality. Second, the assertion that scientific knowledge can only be judged by its instrumental value in helping individuals manage their subjective, instrumental reality. Third, the notion that concepts are the outcome of an individual’s attempt to represent that subjective experience. Fourth, the notion that concepts evolve until they provide a functionally effective presentation of subjective experience.

In New Zealand, researchers Osborne and Wittrock developed a personal constructivist view of learning based on an extensive research on alternative conceptions and ‘children’s science’ that were initiated in Australia and Europe. This version also emphasized the personal but not the social construction of meaning, and learners were seen as capable of altering their own thoughts and actions. These two traditions were also criticized for their failure to consider the socio-cultural contexts of learning. Finally, within the social constructivism tradition, there is a large emphasis on the role of social and cultural aspects in addition to the personal constructivism in learning (Driver, Asoko, Leach, Mortimer & Scott, 1994). The most influential writer on this approach has been Vygotsky whose publications in Russian actually date from the 1930s. Insights from Vygotsky’s work include an awareness of the role of the culture and the social context of the learner in influencing their understanding, an influence that continues throughout life and makes learning meaningful.
Ideas, language and concepts derived from interaction with others thus structure, challenge, enhance or constrain thinking. Whatever role they play, they cannot be excluded from our consideration. Thus, learning is social as well as individual. We therefore have to look at the context in which learning takes place as well as at the nature of specific learning tasks.

The influence of social constructivism theory in education has been considerable since the early 1980s. This is largely due to the recognition that social constructivism recognizes learners’ constructions are mediated within a social context. This view of learning challenges assumptions on which traditional practice is based by rejecting the view of education as the transmission of de-conceptualized skills and knowledge. Instead, learning is seen as an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice. Rather than mainly adding to students fund of knowledge, learning involves “process of transformation of participation itself,” which occurs as a function of all participants ‘transforming roles and understanding in the contexts in which they take part. Such a transformative view of education has far-reaching implications for the role of the teacher and makes it clear that in order to be effective as teachers, there must be a continuing transformation of our practice that is shaped by and shapes our developing understanding of the learners (Chang-Wells & Wells, 1997).

I find the social constructivism perspective to be fundamental in understanding the process of teacher learning in this study. Social constructivism recognizes that knowledge and understanding are constructed when individuals engage socially in talk and activity about shared problems and tasks. In this sense, making meaning is viewed as a dialectic process by which knowledge construction is socially mediated (Driver et al., 1994). Social constructivism also recognizes the importance of reflection. As Watts and Bentley (1991) explain, social constructivism not only emphasizes that the constructors have a central role but
also maintain that at least partially, they are able to control constructive processes through conscious reflection. Accordingly, social constructivism implies negotiation, caring, sharing, collaboration and conversation. Therefore, providing a context where teachers engage in these activities is an integral part of teachers' professional development. The current study, which looks at the process of professional development as teachers inquire into their practice, provides one example of such an orientation.

Viewed as such, social constructivism is congruent with the process of teacher learning and professional development through conducting systematic inquiry into practice. Like all learners, teachers need to construct their own knowledge and theories that are based on their experience, reflection and interaction with others. The teacher-researchers in this study have their own experiences, knowledge and contribution to make to the learning process. The reflective conversations within this small community of learners form an important part of their personal and social construction and reconstruction of knowledge.

To summarize, the above view of teachers as learners emphasizes comprehension, reasoning (Schulman, 1987; Richardson, 1994b; Fenstermacher, 1994), autonomy and self-directedness. It also stresses reflective thinking and practice (Schon, 1987) and suggests that teacher learning should aim to increase an individual teacher's capacity for reflection, critical analysis and what Cochran-Smith (1991) calls teaching "against the grain." The question here is what kind of workplace fosters this type of teacher learning. According to Smyth (1991, 1995) and Darling Hammond (1998), teacher learning is enhanced when teachers are provided with opportunities to work with and learn from others on an ongoing basis. Collective learning experiences provide individuals with a variety of sources of information and ideas.
Traditional approaches to professional development usually organize programs outside the school context. However, many educators argue that professional development should occur within the context where teachers work (Smyth, 1991, 1995; Hargreaves, 1995). They argue that teacher learning is enhanced when teachers are provided with opportunities to work with and learn from others continuously. Teacher collaboration has been considered as an important feature for successful professional development within schools (Richardson, 1994a, 1994b; Fullan, 1995; Oja & Sumalyan, 1989). It is argued that open communication and examination of taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions encourage the free exchange of ideas which in turn promotes critical reflection, creating innovation and self-directed proactive thinking and learning (Richardson & Hamilton, 1994; Smyth, 1995; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1996).

VII. Views of Teachers' Knowledge

A renewed interest in sources of knowledge for teacher learning parallels the movement to transform teaching into a recognized profession. The idea of a knowledge base for teaching has been examined in terms of its domains, its forms and its relation to classroom practice. A number of researchers have proposed frameworks for domains of teacher knowledge (Shulman, 1987; Carter, 1990; Grossman, 1990). According to Shulman’s (1987) theoretical model, teachers draw upon seven domains of knowledge as they plan and carry out their instruction. These are:

(i) Content knowledge: This is the teacher’s understanding of the substantive structure of the subject, that is, of the basic concepts, which delineate the subject and the ways in which they are related.
(ii) **General pedagogical knowledge**: This domain encompasses a teacher's knowledge and belief about teaching, learning and learners. It also includes knowledge of strategies for creating learning environment.

(iii) **Curriculum knowledge**: This is knowledge of official curriculum, the particular examination prescriptions, the school curriculum and the materials (e.g., textbooks and the like).

(iv) **Pedagogical content knowledge**: This consists of an understanding of how a subject, the topic and issues within it can be organized and presented for teaching.

(v) **Knowledge of learners' characteristics**:  

(vi) **Knowledge of educational context**: This category includes knowledge about the school as an institution, along with the culture of the community from which students are drawn.

(vii) **Knowledge of educational goals and values**.

Similarly, Grossman (1990) has identified a typology of teachers' knowledge, which includes six domains. Five of these domains are similar to the ones identified by Shulman (1987) and these are knowledge of content, learners and learning, general pedagogy, curriculum, and context. The sixth domain, which she calls knowledge of the self, has been discussed and elaborated further in the research conducted by Elbaz (1991, 1997). According to Elbaz, knowledge of self is an important facet of teachers' practical knowledge. This knowledge includes teachers' awareness of their own values, goals, philosophies, styles and personal characteristics. Knowledge of self differs from the other domains discussed above in that it is more personal and that abstract theoretical knowledge about teaching is normally filtered through teachers' own values, goals, and personal philosophy. Earlier, Clandinin and
Connelly (1987) argued that all aspects of teachers' knowledge are grounded in personal perspective and experience.

Another way of examining the knowledge base for teaching is by looking at the form of teacher knowledge and its relation to classroom practice. Research conducted by Elbaz (1991, 1997) and Clandinin and Connelly (1987) suggests that teachers' knowledge is inherently personal and organized in terms of narratives. These researchers believe that teachers' knowledge can be best understood through their own stories of teaching, or their autobiographies (Cole & Knowles, 1997), which reflect the teachers' voice and their own perspective. Researchers in the area of personal practical knowledge argue that much of the teachers' knowledge is tacit, contained within the routines, rituals and cycles that comprise teachers' work embodied within a particular context. Based on this assumption, knowledge is therefore embodied within classroom practice. Another form of narrative knowledge might take the form of case knowledge, that is, knowledge composed of experiences with a number of cases of particular pedagogical significance (Shulman, 1991). Like personal practical knowledge, case knowledge is inherently situational and contextual and is represented in narrative form. These cases are considered to have pedagogical purposes, which are useful in learning to teach.

The above views about teachers' knowledge imply that inside knowledge - that is knowledge generated by practitioners in the context of their work- is essential to really understand teaching, with the intent to later use that knowledge to improve classroom practice (Shulman, 1987; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Another implication is that since "top-down" efforts have not always been successful in bringing about significant changes in teachers in order to improve their teaching (Richardson & Hamilton, 1994), efforts should be
made to change educational practices from inside. Therefore, for professional development programs to succeed, they should aim at expanding a teachers’ knowledge base, taking into account that teachers’ knowledge and experience affect how they perceive and act on various messages, which aim to change their practice. When professional development programs create an environment that facilitates and supports teachers’ learning and knowledge production, teachers can then expand and elaborate their professional knowledge base and might alter their teaching. In short, however, the researchers cited above share a common concern that there is an inherently situated dimension of teacher learning that must be central to any attempt to structure professional development for teachers.

VIII. Approaches to the Professional Development of Teachers

In this section, I will examine the different models that are commonly referred to in the literature on teachers’ professional development. The term model here represents a design for teacher learning underlined by a set of theoretical assumptions. I will look at each model in terms of its assumptions about teachers’ knowledge and learning and its provision for bringing about change in teachers’ practices. The models discussed below can be categorized into two different groups:

(1) the interventionist approaches: these are professional development activities conducted for teachers by outsiders.

(2) the non-interventionist approaches: these are professional development activities initiated by teachers within the school.

I. The interventionist approaches:

1.1 Course-based models of professional development
This kind of model is still a widely accepted approach to professional development in many parts of the world. For many teachers, as Bell (1990) contends, professional development occurs through taking courses. In-service courses fall into two groups. The first group is to enhance the existing qualifications so that the teacher can obtain a higher degree. These courses are normally offered by institutions of higher education. The second type is designed for those teachers who are perceived to be experiencing some difficulties (e.g., such as the language courses that are offered to certain EFL teachers in Bahrain to enhance their language skills). These remedial courses are usually run by advisors from the ministry of education or colleges and universities.

The underlying assumption of the course-based model is that improved qualifications would enhance the professional performance of teachers (Bell, 1990). One cannot deny that these courses might have some usefulness for those who voluntarily join them. This model, however, has serious limitations. First, in many cases, the courses are designed to focus on teachers' weaknesses or tend to promise a quick fix for all teachers. This approach, as many researchers (e.g., Clarke, 1992; Fullan, 1991; Lieberman, 1994) argue often fails to bring about significant change in teachers' practices. It also reflects a simplistic notion of the change process. The assumption is that change in schools can be brought about by changing selected individuals within the school. They will then successfully generate change in others to the extent that the school will be eventually transformed. Recent studies on school change indicate that teachers normally resist change that is imposed upon them. As Richardson (1990) explains, one reason that teachers resist altering their practices is that it is outsiders, rather than teachers themselves, who require teachers to change. Furthermore, the courses offered to teachers emphasize the expertise of those outside the school who have selected the
content of the courses and in most cases without teachers’ participation or input. Finally, this model also reflects the bureaucratic view of teaching discussed earlier because it denies the legitimacy of teachers as experts or professionals who are capable of determining their own professional needs.

1.2 The training models:

The purpose of the training model is to enable teachers to learn new knowledge and skills in workshop settings that are usually prepared and run by an expert from outside school who, like the course-based model, predetermines the content and the flow of the activities. The focus can be on such areas as teachers acquiring new disciplinary knowledge, approaches to new curriculum and instruction, ideas about learning styles or cooperative learning strategies in a relatively short period of time.

There are two major assumptions that underpin the training model. The first is that learning involves the transmission of knowledge from one person, ‘the expert’ to another, the teacher - an important feature if time is of the essence. This view implies that training can be accomplished by breaking knowledge or skills down into manageable chunks, and imparting these to teachers who absorb them and apply whatever they have been taught into practice. The training model assumes that knowledge can be parcelled and transmitted in a linear fashion (Williams, 1999). The second assumption is that the change being promoted is usually good for teachers in all settings and they should therefore adjust their teaching in the direction suggested by the staff developers (Richardson & Hamilton, 1994; Bell, 1990). Again, as argued earlier about the course-based model, this notion of change fails to
acknowledge the complexity of school as an organization. In general, the training model has a number of limitations, which can be summarized as follows.

1. The sessions usually originate outside the school and often mandate teachers to participate (Imants & Tileman, 1993).

2. They are designed and implemented by groups outside the school, and teachers are seldom involved in decisions about the content and the structure of the sessions that they attend (Richardson & Hamilton, 1994).

3. Teachers are expected to change their practices often after brief demonstrations of what is required with few opportunities to compare their ideas with others (Theissen, 1992).

4. The training sessions are mostly formal and unrelated to classroom life and are often a mélange of abstract ideas about learning and changed practices (Lieberman, 1996; Little, 1993). As Little (1993) explains, compressed into a short time frame, most training sessions place teachers in passive roles as consumers of knowledge produced elsewhere. Professional development of this kind is top-down and the proposed activities are usually reactive in response to some perceived problem or deficit (Hyde & Pink, 1992).

1.3 Observation/Assessment model

The purpose of this model is to provide teachers with feedback from another person (an observer) about their classroom instruction. Clinical supervision, coaching and teacher evaluation are some of the examples of programs based upon this model. The activities of this model usually include: (a) a pre-observation conference, (b) time spent in the class during which the observer collects data, and (c) a post-observation conference in which data are presented and discussed.
According to Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1990), four assumptions underlie the observation and assessment model. First, this model provides teachers with data to reflect upon and analyze in order to improve their classroom instruction. Second, this reflection can be enhanced by observation of another person (a colleague or a supervisor). The third assumption is that both the teacher and the observer can benefit from the experience and finally, teachers will be more motivated to improve their teaching when they see positive results from their efforts to change.

This model, I believe, is rooted in behavioral psychology which emphasizes the development of specific and observable skills of teaching which are assumed to be related to student learning (Zeichner, 1983). According to this model, classroom knowledge is viewed as a major source of teachers' knowledge. The prospective teacher is viewed, in this sense, as a passive recipient, who plays little part in determining substance and direction of his/her professional development. Although some proponents of the clinical supervision model would claim that the teacher being observed has almost complete control in that they decide what is to be observed and, in some cases, how it is to be done, Glatthorn (1995) argues that one of the limitations of this model is its over emphasis on the basic skills of teaching as well as its failure to differentiate the needs of experienced teachers from those of novices. In addition to this, the application of this model is considered impractical and labor-intensive and is usually not conducted in the linear fashion that is proposed.

Discussion and exchange of ideas seem to be positive features of the above model. However, my concern is related to two factors. The first is that the presence of an observer in the classroom can disturb the classroom environment and may lead the teacher to act and teach differently because of an outsider's presence. Therefore, the lesson may not reflect an
authentic classroom activity. Secondly, when teachers are observed by their supervisors, they may view this process as a form of evaluation and therefore their performance would be affected, as would their learning.

II. Non-interventionist approaches to professional development

II.1 Teacher-initiated or self directed model

According to this model, teachers plan for and pursue activities to promote their own learning in their own school context. The teachers, for instance, read professional journals, experiment with new instructional strategies that they have designed, visit other teachers' classrooms, devise growth plans and study new instructional materials (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1990). This model includes four phases of activities which can be conducted formally or informally by teachers: (1) identifying personal needs and interests, (2) developing a plan to address these needs, (3) engaging in learning activities and, finally, (4) conducting self-assessment.

The above model makes a number of assumptions with regard to teachers' knowledge and learning. First, it reflects that teachers are more active and ready to learn than is usually thought (Clarke, 1992). Second, like other learners, teachers “learn most efficiently when they initiate and plan their learning activities, rather than spend their time in activities that are less relevant to them than those they would design” (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1990, p.235). This model holds that individuals are most motivated to learn when they select their own learning goals based on the assessment of their needs. A third assumption is that adult development is voluntary. Therefore, no one can force an adult to learn, change or grow. When adults feel that they are in full control of the change process, they are more inclined to
realize the full value from it than when they are forced into training situations in which they have little say about the whole process (Clarke, 1992).

The features of this model are rooted in psychological theories of human development and learning. This individualistic orientation emphasizes the importance of individual teachers deciding upon their own professional development options (action research workshops, courses, graduate programs at the university etc.). The individually-guided model also demonstrates the influence of human psychology and, in particular, the work of Carl Rogers (1980) who stated that self-directed learning is based on the hypothesis that "individuals have within themselves vast resources for self-directed behavior, these resources can be tapped if a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided" (quoted in Millers & Seller, 1990, p. 128). While this model does not exclude or necessarily avoid the pitfalls associated with most of the previous forms of professional development, it rather emphasizes the teacher's role in initiating his/her own learning. Moreover, the self-directed model of professional development implies that teachers are all self-motivated and can direct their own process of professional development.

The limitation of this model however is the absence of objective feedback to the teachers' effort for self-growth (Glatthorn, 1995). Another limitation could be that this model might foster the conventional view of teaching as a lonely profession. Many have written about the culture of teaching as a lonely profession (Hargreaves, 1992, 1995; Lortie, 1975; Lieberman & Miller, 1992). Indeed many teacher educators have pointed out the importance of collaboration among teachers to provide teachers with more support in their effort for self-development. Therefore, many teacher educators advocate a collaborative model of professional development, which I shall discuss below.
II.2 Collaborative model

According to this inquiry-based model, teachers working collectively learn by formulating their own questions and investigating them by gathering data from classrooms and analyzing them. For example, teachers record classroom events to understand their students' learning strategies or explore the effectiveness of their current practice. Collaborative action research is an example of this model that is usually reflected in the literature of teachers' professional development. Since the 1980s, action research has re-emerged as a significant form of inquiring into practice and teachers in many parts of the world such as North America, Europe, Australia, and Asia are encouraged to engage in this type of inquiry as part of their in-service professional development (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Elliott 1991; Altrichter et.al, 1993; Calhoun, 1994; Walker, 1997). Teachers conducting action research usually explore a curricular, instructional or systematic problem within their school. Action research can take on a variety of forms. Collaborative forms can be between teachers themselves or between teachers and outsiders such as university researchers who act as external consultants to facilitate the process (Oja & Smulyan, 1989; Baird & Northfield, 1992).

The view of teachers learning in this model is informed by the notion of reflective rationality (Schon, 1983). Reflective rationality emphasizes that solutions to problems of practice are developed only inside the context in which they arise and that teachers, as professionals, are a crucial determining element in determining tacit knowledge available for public scrutiny through articulation of issues relevant to their practice. This view is supported by many teacher educators (e. g., Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Cochran-Smith, 1991; Richardson & Hamilton, 1994; Darling- Hammond & McLaughlin, 1996, and many others).
They argue that teacher collaboration is one of the features of successful professional
development programs. Furthermore, in a collaborative school environment, learning and
development become engaging for teachers. Experiencing and helping each other to produce
new knowledge become as compelling as consuming already existing knowledge
(Lieberman, 1996), and that barriers to change may disappear (Bell, 1990; Theissen, 1992).
Although many have argued the significance of collaboration and collegiality within schools
in helping teachers learn and accept change, one concern is related to the fact that teaching
remains a lonely profession. Most of the days, teachers work autonomously in their
classrooms, isolated from their colleagues. Consequently, collaboration and collegiality, as
Clement and Staessens (1993) admit are not characteristics of most schools. The underlying
assumption is that professional development of teachers does not only depend on the
individual, but it is also influenced by the organizational context within which it takes place
(Clement & Staessens, 1993). Collaborative models of professional development, I believe,
can only be successful if teachers are the ones who have made the decision to work
collaboratively inquire into matters of their practice and have complete control of the process.
The crucial point is that teachers initiate the process and are responsible for sustaining it. In
addition, school supports (in the form of providing teachers with release time as well as
financial and moral support) will help teachers to see the value of the whole process and
benefit from it. Another concern related to collaborative professional development involves
issues of power and control, especially in situations where academics collaborate with
teachers and act as facilitators. The problem arises when teachers feel that they do not control
the whole process and therefore all parties must sensitively handle the relationship so that the
teachers feel equality in participation (Richardson, 1994b, Nowlan, 2001).
Finally, the major assumptions of the collaborative model can be summarized in the following quote from Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1990):

a) teachers are viewed as intelligent, inquiring individuals with legitimate expertise and important experiences, b) teachers are inclined to search for data to formulate situations, and c) teachers develop new understanding such as they contribute to and formulate their own questions and collect their data to answer them. (p. 243)

Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined professional development literature pertinent to the study. I first looked at how teachers' in-service professional development is conceived among teacher educators and discussed how these different views contribute to influencing the way professional development programs are conducted. Then I reviewed two groups of professional development activities, which reflect certain assumptions about how teachers learn, the knowledge base for teaching and the teachers' role in the educational improvement. It was argued that interventionist approaches of staff development value externally generated knowledge about teaching and view teachers as merely passive recipients of such knowledge. These approaches are therefore oriented towards helping teachers assimilate new techniques into an existing system of ideas about pedagogy and subject knowledge. A number of school reformers argue, instead, that for teachers to successfully make major changes in their teaching practice requires a different model altogether. This model is school-centered and teacher led, builds a collaborative culture among teachers and leads to substantive changes rather than the kind of surface changes often found when reform is mandated or led by outside experts (Becker & Reil, 1999). But as teacher educators have argued, the current agenda of school reform requires not only that teachers master new technical skills, but also more importantly, they reconceptualize the overall nature of their teaching practice.
Teaching, as Nelson and Hammerman (1996) as well as Posch (1992) believe, needs to become an intellectual endeavor, one by which teachers inquire deeply into the nature of knowing rather than a technical craft. The movement towards conceiving teaching as an intellectual enterprise clearly requires different types of professional development activities than are currently in use. One possibility that has the potential for engaging teachers in continuous growth and development is teacher-research. Research conducted by teachers to examine their practice for the purpose of improvement is felt to have valuable outcomes and possibilities for bringing about lasting changes in the teaching practice.

It is not, however, to claim that workshops and other professional development activities have no value whatsoever and therefore should be abandoned. Rather, teacher-research should be viewed as an option that is open to all teachers in an environment that encourages and support teachers' inquiries for ongoing professional growth. As Fullan (1995, p. 255) has beautifully said, “at its best, professional development is learning how to make a difference through learning to bring about ongoing improvement”. The following chapter will explore the nature of teacher research as an approach to teacher development and discusses some critics' views with regard to the capacity of this mode of inquiry in bringing about worthwhile changes in the practice of teachers.
"If teachers are to learn from the experience of being in schools, schools themselves have to prioritize learning, not only among the pupils but among their staff; in other words schools must become learning organizations." (Young, 2000: p.165)

Introduction

Recently, there has been a growing interest among teachers, teacher educators and educational researchers in exploring the potential of teacher research as a model of school-based professional development (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; and Cochran-Smith, 1994) and a possible venue for generating practical knowledge and reforming education (Hollingsworth & Sockett, 1994; Jungck 1996; Zeichner & Klehr, 1999). In this chapter, I will first offer a definition of teacher research and will briefly review the historical development of this mode of inquiry. Following this, I will consider the criticisms raised against teacher research as a valid method of inquiry and finally argue for the potential of teacher research as a suitable model of teacher learning and development that can lead to a significant change in practice.

I. Teacher Research: Definition and assumptions

Teacher research is defined as a “deliberate systematic and rigorous inquiry undertaken by school practitioners into their own practice, understanding and situations (Nias, 1990, p. 24). Generally, the goal of teacher inquiries is the improvement of the classroom practice and the
situation in which teaching and learning take place so that eventually student learning is enhanced and the overall quality of schooling is improved. As a movement, teacher research has evolved as a reaction against the traditional view of teachers as technicians who fulfill the requirements of outside experts (Posch, 1992). Furthermore, it rejects the top-down form of educational research that excludes teachers from the whole process and treats them as key figures of the reform process (Zeichner, 1994).

The above definition of teacher research is based on important assumptions about the role of teachers and the type of knowledge they produce. First, it recognizes that teachers must play a significant role in determining the purposes of their work. Second, teachers have their own contribution to the knowledge that informs the educational community. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1992) have argued, the generation of knowledge about classroom practice is not the exclusive privilege of the outside researchers, namely the institutions of higher education. Traditionally, teachers’ questions and pressing problems were mostly ignored by conventional research methods. Even when outside researchers study the problems related to teaching, they normally employ social scientific conceptual frameworks and use research methods and report language that is unfamiliar to practitioners (Nias, 1990). Because of this, classroom teachers have generally considered this type of research irrelevant to their lives and attach little value to it. As Elliott (1991) explains, traditional research methods have further increased the gap between theory and practice. Theory, many teachers feel, is threatening because it is produced by a group of outsiders who claim to be experts at generating valid knowledge about educational process. Theory for teachers is simply the product of power exercised through the mastery of a specialized body of techniques. It negates their professional culture, which defines teaching competence as a matter of intuitive
craft knowledge tacitly acquired through experience. Because of this, the teacher research movement has continued to expand, and practitioners have come to realize that in order to understand their practice, they need to reflect upon their teaching as an ongoing process which signifies that teacher learning is a continuous endeavor which continues throughout their entire career (Fullan, 1991).

II. Historical Context

The teacher research movement emerged in the United Kingdom during the British curriculum reform process in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was Lawrence Stenhouse and John Elliott who began to articulate the significance of teacher participation in school improvement at the classroom level. Stenhouse, the director of the center for Applied Research in education at the University of East Anglia, was the first to write about teachers as researchers, an advocacy which arose directly from his work as director of the humanities project. In his book, *Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development*, Stenhouse (1975) introduced the notion of teacher as researcher as he asserted:

Outstanding capacity of the extended professional is a capacity of autonomous professional self-development, through systematic self-study, through the study of the work of other teachers and through the testing of ideas by classroom procedures. (p. 144)

Later on, in the mid 1970s, Elliott and his colleagues in their Ford Teaching Project published many teacher research case studies, and booklets on research techniques, and organized conferences for teacher researchers. Elliott (1991) writes that teacher research began as a teacher-led curriculum reform movement that grew out of concern by teachers over the forced implementation of behavioral objectives in the curriculum. For both
Stenhouse and Elliott, the capacity of teachers themselves in research undermined the kind of objectivity espoused by traditional researchers working with the natural science model.

In North America, the concept of teacher as researcher had been long ago expressed by John Dewey (1938), who stated that: "It seems to me that the contributions that might come from classroom teachers are a comparatively neglected field, or, to change the metaphor, an almost unworked mine" (Cited in McKernan, 1988, p. 177). In the 1940s, Kurt Lewin introduced action research as a form of research to study social problems. Later, in the 1950s, it was Stephen Corey who promoted action research in education at Columbia Teachers College. Corey believed that it is more beneficial if teachers rather than outside researchers studied their own classroom problems. However, Anderson, Herr and Nihler (1994) argue that the teacher research movement in North America was not derivative of the action research movement of the 1940s or the 1950s. Rather, it began as a reaction against a number of circumstances that are summarized below:

1. The dominance of quantitative, positivistic paradigm of research in education, which was challenged by qualitative, case study and ethnographic research from the late 1960s on.
2. Research on successful school change efforts and schools as contexts for teachers’ professional growth began to report that school based problem solving and approaches to change were more likely to be successful than outside-in perspectives.
3. Many teacher educators and school collaborators began to emphasize the influence of teacher research in restructuring schools (Anderson et. al. 1994, pp. 21-22).

Although many teachers have embraced the idea of doing research to improve their practice and generate knowledge about it, not all teacher educators hold similar views on the effectiveness of the teacher research movement and have certain reservations. Below, I will
discuss the various criticisms raised against teacher research, and where appropriate attempt to respond to these criticisms. I will discuss these criticisms under two categories:

1. The extent to which teacher research can bring about significant change in practice.
2. The ability of teachers to conduct systematic inquiry into their own practice.

III. Criticisms of Teacher Research

1. The extent to which teacher research can bring about significant change in practice.

Despite its popularity and wider recognition among school practitioners, teacher research has been subjected to a number of different criticisms. The first criticism is related to the power of teacher research to bring about significant change in teaching. It is argued that there is little evidence that teacher research is more effective in changing practitioners teaching than the generally accepted methods of professional development (Hammersley, 1993). Although the literature reports on a large number of studies, such as action research projects that are conducted by teachers investigating their own practice (see for example the Project for Enhancing Effective Learning, known as PEEL, conducted by teachers in Australia, and other action research projects reported from New Zealand, United Kingdom, Malaysia, and other parts of the world), these studies however, are usually unrecognized by the wider academic communities. The problem is that there is a general disregard for the teachers’ knowledge in the educational establishment, which has usually articulated a knowledge base for teaching minus the voices of the creators themselves (Zeichner, 1994; Acker, 1999). Furthermore, I believe it is difficult to substantiate the above claim since there is no systematic evaluation of the impact of teacher research upon professional behavior of the
practicing teachers or upon the quality of the learning experiences provided to students (Zeichner & Klehr, 1999). Most of the current studies conducted by teacher researchers consider the impact of research upon teacher inquirers from the perspective of the researchers themselves, and are mostly not published in the academic journals.

Other critics claim that even when teacher researchers have learnt new skills and a new language of discourse in higher institutions, they are often unable to bring about change in their own schools. Teacher researchers have been criticized for taking a narrow view of research because of their over-emphasis upon personal renewal at the expense of social reconstruction (Goodson, 1992; Atkins, 1994). According to this argument, by emphasizing classroom practice, teacher-researchers have ignored the extent to which they can bring about institutional change. Initially, the focus on personal problems and concerns I believe, is significant and should be valued as teacher researchers attempt first to explore how to form an understanding of themselves and of their context and then learn how to improve their practice. If we argue that teachers should play a key role in initiating change and improvement, then we need to understand how teachers conceptualize change themselves and respect the agenda they set for their personal renewal. Many teacher educators have acknowledged that top-down efforts do not lead to significant change in teachers' practices. It is therefore essential to hand teachers the responsibility to direct their own development. If we accept this argument, then perhaps we should allow teachers the opportunity to grapple with change at a personal level until inquiry and reflective questioning becomes a norm in schools and teachers will eventually move their inquiries to address larger institutional factors. As Corey (1953) has stated, the quality of teacher research will gradually improve as teachers gain more experience with research (cited in Noffke, 1997, p: 9). The tension
between conducting research to improve one’s practice as opposed to aiming more for institutional reform is reflected in the work of many educators who advocate teacher research. McKernan (1988) and Elliott (1991) for example seem primarily concerned with changes in individual teachers, whereas Zeichner (1994), Winer (1989) and Atkins (1994) argue that teacher research should move beyond issues of personal improvement. They cite Stenhouse’s (1975) view of teacher as researcher when he first introduced this concept. For Stenhouse, a teacher researcher is an individual who is committed to emancipation as well as self-renewal. The question is, whether the focus on the personal arena - one’s own classroom - can in fact be seen as helping in efforts to reconstruct the political in educational thought and practice. Some researchers have specified the reasons why practitioners choose to initially focus upon their own practice rather than addressing political issues. According to Noffke and Brenan (1997, p. 65-67), keeping research bound within the personal control does not necessarily imply a lack of interest in significant political change. But rather, it reflects some other reasons related to work culture of schools. One reason might be that the work culture of teachers has intensified in recent years (Sachs, 1999) and has become ever more open to scrutiny. Because of this, research fostered by those outside of classroom can be interpreted as a means of surveillance to others’ agenda and as a result, some teacher research projects have deliberately gone in the opposite direction. Another reason is related to the misunderstanding of the educational and political context in which teachers work. For example, teachers might believe that the government initiatives or the university personnel might not have their best interest at the forefront of the agenda. In fact, teacher research is a political activity. It focuses on students and their experiences in schooling and the resulting deepening awareness of what is involved in the complex process of teaching and learning may sustain
teachers in their frequently socially developed work. While acknowledging the importance of constructing personal understanding, both Zeichner (1994) and Nowlan (2001) argue that for teacher research to be effective, practitioners must take into account both the social aspect and broader institutional contexts of their career. The social aspect also includes political contexts and Nowlan (2001) warns that the danger however is that the political aspects may support the academic knowledge rather than the interest of the teacher researchers. Furthermore, I believe the reason why many teacher researchers tend to initially focus upon their classroom is related to the whole system of schooling in which they operate. As Posch (1992) describes, “the dominating culture of teaching and learning in schools is conducive neither to teacher research nor to the professionalization of teachers” (pp. 1-2). This culture is characterized by the prevalence of top-down communication, which facilitates the control process for pre-defined knowledge structures and discourages self-control and cooperation between teachers. Therefore, traditionally, teachers have been told what to do in their classrooms and have little to say on their own. They are not accustomed to seeing themselves as agents of school reform or as capable of generating their own practical knowledge. Supporting this, Day (1997, p.197) explains, that conditions in most schools for most teachers continue to prohibit any detailed consideration of the complex factors which contribute often in conflicting ways to their classroom practices. Teachers are then likely to operate on a model of a restricted professionality. Once they have developed a personal solution to any problems of teaching that they perceive - and this is usually achieved without any systematic assistance by others - it is unlikely that this solution is made public or shared with others in such settings. Now, a culture built upon the values of teacher research with an emphasis upon the examination of practice, challenges the taken-for granted (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993)
and places a high priority upon change and collaboration, which might seem alien to the craft culture of schools. As Nias (1990) further explains, it is in the majority’s interest to marginalize the teacher researcher’s innovative efforts. The existence of teachers who are committed to the improvement of their practice through inquiry and research might be seen as a threat to other teachers’ status in a school and therefore dose not necessarily lead to a widespread change in the whole school. Moreover, teachers are generally aware of their school culture and it is for this reason that probably many choose to focus primarily upon self-improvement rather than tackling more controversial issues. They are implicitly aware that their research might lead to a political conflict over an educational practice therefore threatening their career. Many educators have discussed the school culture and believe that it may act as a barrier to teacher research (Day, 1993; Hobson, 1996).

While generally the school culture may act as a major barrier to the extent to which teacher research can influence the school as an institution, there are cases, which demonstrate that given opportunities and school support, teacher research is capable of affecting the school as an institution. As an illustration, I will draw upon three case studies that demonstrate the power of teacher research in bringing about institutional change.

In the first study, Winer (1989), a British teacher educator, was involved in a teacher-research project sponsored by the British School Council, which aimed to establish the eradication of gender inequalities in the school. One of the major goals of the project was to support teachers as researchers in exploring issues in the schools and in accumulating practices from teacher research, which served to reduce gender inequalities. Winer’s analysis revealed two segments of the teacher research movement, the mainstream movement and the gender research movement. The mainstream movement focused on issues related to
professional development of the researching teachers and concentrated on the process of reflective inquiry rather than the outcome of the research. The second, segment on the other hand, placed more emphasis upon the outcome of their research and was more concerned with increasing social justice within their school. Although both groups of teacher-researchers were concerned with professional development and learning, Winer (1989) concludes that only the gender researchers connected the efforts explicitly to influence their school policy. So, this study illustrates that the extent to which teacher research will influence teachers at the classroom level or have an impact on broader context depends on the focus of the inquiry itself and the process involved. In other words, it is a matter of choice, rather than capacity or potential, because teacher research has the potential to contribute at both levels.

A second and a more recent study, reported by Dadds (1995) is another example of the impact of teacher research upon school. Dadds studied a school teacher named Vicki who was involved in a number of action research projects that aimed at updating her knowledge and learning about her own teaching as well as the working environment in her school. Vicki was both a classroom teacher and a coordinator of the humanities curriculum throughout the school. Her first research was classroom based which examined the process of learning to deal with students with special needs. Her second and longer project was institutionally based and looked at gender issues in education. Vicki wanted to change the gendered-world of schooling even in a small way. She presented her findings to the whole school in a staff development event, which had a significant influence on the school members. As a result of this teacher's research, a working group was established which drew up a draft policy document. There was a review of the gender nature of book resources, a reappraisal of the role models being offered to children in history, geography, science and drama, a new
awareness of gender behavior and language patterns. The significant outcome of Vicki’s research was that her research changed the gender-based culture of the school. Dadds (1995) explains, as he continued to revisit Vicki’s school, even when she had left to take a new post, the Deputy Head gave evidence of gender changes which grew out of this teacher’s initiative and inquiry.

The final study was conducted in the American context and further illustrates the power of teacher research to effect changes within the school. Seven mentor teachers in California whose inquiry had a policy focus conducted this research. The group met regularly with two university facilitators whose role was mainly to help the group conduct their inquiry (Atkins, 1994). The meetings focused upon the discussions of these seven teachers, regarding their mentoring roles, professional dilemmas and problems and how they valued the work they were doing. The study group gradually turned its attention to the matter of trying to understand more about the mentor program itself, and how they might protect and improve the entire mentor program rather than concentrating mainly on how they might enhance their professional activities within the confines of their immediate jobs, which seemed to have been the initial motivation for getting together.

Encouraged by the two university facilitators, the group generated a report which included information about the statewide mentoring program and the benefits of such programs based on the information gathered from questionnaires and teacher interviews. The final section of the report identified issues that the group considered needed attention. This report was then published and made available to interested teachers outside California. It turned out that the study group’s publication was one of the few to that date (1994) on mentor teaching and the topic was rapidly receiving considerable attention. Encouraged by this
prospect, the researching teachers decided to target key policy makers in statewide education to lobby for the continuation of the program. They sent personal letters along with copies of the report and made phone calls to explain the benefits of the mentor-teaching program. It was through the group’s research and action that significantly influenced rescuing the program from elimination.

Although the above studies demonstrate that teacher-research has taken a different direction than that usually known, that is, emphasizing increasing self-knowledge and focusing on classroom practice alone, it seems that this is not yet a common orientation. While acknowledging the significance of emphasizing personal concerns, I also concur with many teacher educators (Zeichner, 1994; Atkins, 1994) who argue that in addition to the concern for self-improvement and learning, teacher researchers need to extend their inquiries to consider how their actions challenge and support access to and achievement of a high quality of education for all students. This, however, might not be easy in certain contexts that are characterized by the absence of democracy. The literature on teacher research developed in the west assumes that teachers possess a high degree of autonomy and professional freedom. By and large, teachers in the west are unencumbered to criticize the society and the institutions around them, whereas such freedom does not exist in other parts of the world. As a teacher myself, I have felt this uneasiness when I relate to my own educational context and how limited are the teachers’ opportunities in decision making process within the school, let alone a wider educational context. The dilemma is that in such context, teachers’ only choice is to opt for and accept minor changes. To a certain extent, achieving even small changes at the school level might seem rewarding and empowering. Yet, the fact remains that in those contexts, the first step towards an effective participation of teachers in educational reform, is
for teachers to have more decision making power within the educational system and to be viewed as professionals, capable of influencing the change process.

2. The ability of teachers to conduct systematic inquiry into their own practice.

Whereas the critiques mentioned earlier question the effectuality of structured self-study in bringing about change in schools, other critiques emphasize the specialized nature of research, and the difficulties, which teachers encounter in doing it well. Critics argue that although all teachers reflect upon their daily practice, not all teachers want to be teacher-researchers (Humphreys, Penny, Nielsen & Loeve, 1996; Hancock, 2001). They argue that teacher research is a rigorous type of inquiry, which many teachers do not welcome. According to Glass (1993), teacher research is a waste of teachers’ professional effort. He further maintains that teachers have neither the time nor the resources to carry out ‘proper research’. Therefore, to encourage them to do research will divert them from their real responsibility, which is to learn more about curriculum through reading, attending conferences and taking training courses. Johnston (1994) takes a similar stance in suggesting that the conduct of research should be left to professionals, meaning the academics in the university and colleges. Johnston further questions whether teacher-research is a ‘natural’ process for teachers. Echoing Hammersley (1993), she is concerned that teachers might be viewed as lacking the ability because they appear to need outside help in order to engage with research. She concludes that there is a dissonance between action research and teaching:

Teachers’ reluctance to take on action research may arise because action research, although appearing on the surface to be a natural part of what is considered to be good teaching, actually does not fit with the processes that reflective inquiring teachers use. (Johnston, 1994, p.43)
Humphrey’s et al. (1996) explain that, although many teachers wish to develop their practice through reflection, they do not favor research because to them research demands change which is not valued by teachers. Indeed, one cannot deny the fact that teacher-research is a rigorous inquiry and requires time and skills to conduct it well. Yet, one of the reasons why teacher research is thought to be of less interest to teachers has to do with the reputation of educational research, which also tends to function as an obstacle to teacher learning. Educational research has frequently been presented to school practitioners as “uncovered truth” about the most effective way to teach definitive procedures for evaluating student learning. Because educational research is rarely presented to teachers as value-laden and socially constructed, teachers are often discouraged to interrogate its premises and relevance for their own situation. The fact that most educational research is perceived by teachers as irrelevant to their daily work contributes to their unwillingness to believe both that teacher research has the potential to be relevant and that they themselves might want to be researchers (Wells, 1994; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1996; Hancock, 2001; Nowlan, 2001).

Another reason for teachers’ lack of enthusiasm to pursue research as a method of inquiry is related to the concept of “research”. According to Stenhouse (1975), research is a “systematic enquiry made public”, the process of making the enquiry public may seem problematic to many teachers. The reason for this as both Nias (1990) and Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1996) explain is related to the school culture, which as argued earlier, has traditionally fostered teacher isolation and authority dependence to the extent that teachers underrate their practical knowledge. Teachers have been made to believe that research is something done by ‘experts’, as something they can never do (Jungck, 1996). For many teachers, their work and their knowledge is seen to be relevant only to themselves and
therefore they do not publish it because they feel their context is unique, and their experience cannot be generalized to other situations. Adding to this is the public expectation of teachers and of their role in the generation of practical knowledge. According to Hancock (2001), there never has been a public expectation that teachers would write about the theory underpinning their classroom craft. Teachers' insight about learning has generally been unrecognized as a valid form of professional knowledge. Because of this, many teachers believe less in themselves and in their ability as professionals to generate something worthwhile to say and share with other practitioners.

The working conditions of teachers seem to be another reason why teachers shy away from seeing themselves as researchers. Both Hollingsworth (1994) and Sachs (1999) explain the demands of working in schools seem to prevent teachers from systematically inquiring into their practice and documenting their insights. As a group, teachers work under less than professional conditions. They teach a large number of students and are also expected to do a lot of other related school activities and build relationships with other teachers, and parents. A lot of teachers’ creativity and energy is therefore directed toward managing their practice and coping with the complexity of their work environment (Nias, 1989; Acker, 1999).

While Feldman (1999) questions whether teachers should engage in research modeled on the academic research, Wells on the other hand (1994) suggests that there is a need for a different criteria by which teacher research is evaluated. Whereas traditional research, whether qualitative or quantitative, is judged in terms of the significance and the generalizability of its findings, teacher research, it is argued, should be judged more in terms of the learning that results for the persons who carry it out and the improvement they recognize in their practice as a result of engaging in self-inquiry. Other criteria should not be
entirely ignored, but whenever exhibited should be regarded as an added value to teacher research. In other words, the principal criterion for assessing teacher research is not the significance of its findings for others but primarily the value of the experience of understanding it holds for teacher researchers (Lieberman & Miller, 1992). Clearly, there seems to be no consensus about how teacher research should be conceptualized and evaluated.

Finally, the issue of time, critics argue, seems to be a major obstacle for conducting teacher research (Jungck, 1996; Day, 1997; Acker, 1999). The work of Goodlad (1984) on schools revealed that teaching is a profession that leaves little time for personal reflection and sharing among colleagues. Mitchelle (1999) further explains that time is not built into the daily work structure for inquiry. Teachers are expected not to 'sacrifice' instructional time with their students but to use their private time (i.e., hours after school, on the week-ends, or professional development days) to invest in professional learning. An important issue is therefore to consider how much control teachers have over their time. Hargreaves (1989), for example argues, that teachers have little control over their working time. He identifies three dimensions of time: (a) micropolitical, which refers to the way time is distributed according to status and power, (b) phenomenological time, that is the way time is lived or experienced by different members of the school, and finally (c) sociopolitical time, which refers to the way time is allocated and used in schools. In some instances, much of teachers' time is wasted in matters that are not related to actual teaching because administrators colonize time by claiming more and more of it for other school purposes. This leaves teachers with less and less flexible time for other activities than classroom teaching. Therefore, to be able to have enough time to conduct research, teachers need an increased control over their time in
schools. The argument presented here in short, is that it is true that teacher inquiry requires a considerable amount of time, but it is unjust to blame teachers for not making the time available. Rather, it is crucial to understand the context of teachers’ work and not to disregard the culture of the school and other factors that deprive practitioners of gaining more control over how they spend their working time within the school. As Sockett (1993, p.61) argues, much depends on how we define teaching and what counts as the framework for professional development within a career. If teacher research is just an optional extra for a few dedicated teachers within the conception of a career, rather than a primary avenue for professional development and teacher emancipation, time will obviously not be made available.

The criticisms reviewed above might carry a pessimistic tone within them. Considering all the complexities of the teaching enterprise the reader at this point might wonder why then teachers bother with doing research or, in other words, what makes teachers want to do research. In my view, scrutinizing the context of teachers’ work and the reality of schools is significant in order to understand the value of the efforts exhibited by those teachers who challenge all these obstacles and decide to, what Cochran Smith and Lytle (1991) call, go ‘against the grain’. It is interesting to note that most of these critiques have been raised by the academics and educational researchers. It would be interesting to investigate all these issues from the teacher researchers’ own perspectives, or those who have worked closely alongside them and see whether the practitioners themselves have doubts about their ability and need to conduct research on their own practice. The evidence from the literature on teachers’ professional development portrays a different picture of those teachers who have turned to research and inquiry as a new venue for learning. Many of them have reported positive gains from this experience. They develop self-confidence as they decide on how to direct their
learning. Through examining, analyzing and reflecting, they feel they become more effective practitioners and develop a more positive attitude toward their profession (Nias, 1990). They also learn that when they collaborate with other teachers, their voice is strengthened as they develop the ability to question their work context and the complex demands placed upon them (Sachs, 1999). They also learn that through doing research, they develop their researching skills and become more sensitive to their students and improve the quality of their teaching (Baird & Mitchelle, 1992; Zeichner & Klehr, 1999).

I believe acknowledging the challenges that teacher researchers face when they decide to investigate their practice does not necessarily ignore the fact that as professionals, teachers are capable of contributing to the generation of knowledge about their practice. Based on the teachers' accounts on the value of inquiring into practice, I propose the adoption of teacher research as a possible venue to promote teacher development and a higher quality of teaching. I argued earlier that the new enthusiasm for teachers' inquiry has grown as a reaction against a technical view of teaching that considers teachers as users of externally generated knowledge, and a rejection of top-down forms of educational reform that have traditionally excluded teachers from the school improvement efforts. In contrast to this perspective, the teacher research movement recognizes the role of teachers as active participants in educational reform as well as their invaluable contribution in the generation of knowledge about their practice. Along with other cautious researchers, I believe that teacher research should not be seen as panacea to most of the complexities of classroom practice. Rather it should be an option made available for many who are eager to contribute in the generation of knowledge about their practice and are eager to bridge the gap between theory and practice.
Although the danger, as Zeichner (1994) expresses, is that these sentiments might lead to the rejection of university generated knowledge, it is unrealistic to rely solely upon the institutions of higher education for the generation of knowledge about teaching. One cannot deny the value of knowledge produced by educational researchers outside schools, but this external knowledge, as literature on teacher development has revealed, does not give a complete picture of the entire world of teaching from within and the complexities of the whole process. The reason as Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990, p.83) have stated is that:

Conspicuous by their absence from the literature of research on teaching are the voices of teachers, the question and problems they pose, the framework they use to interpret and improve their practice and the ways they define and understand their work lives.

Finally, it should be emphasized that for the teacher-research movement to be successful in achieving its goals, and gain wider recognition among the academic community, the movement requires a lot of active support from various sources. Within the school, administrative support is crucial in the form of time and resources for teachers working together to plan and carry out their inquiries (Wells, 1994; Jungck, 1996). At a minimum, school administrators should value the work of teacher-researchers who are confident enough to initiate and carry out their own inquiries (Wells, 1994). As Barth (1990) suggests, the way in which the school principal relates to other members of the staff and the model of the teacher that he/she provides will set the pattern for all other relationships within the school. Then, if the school is to become a community of inquiring learners, the principal must also engage in continuous personal and professional growth carried out in collaboration with colleagues. Many teacher educators have emphasized the importance of school transformation into a culture where teacher learning is prioritized. Both Darling-Hammond
(1998, p.3) and Young (2000) have argued for the need to providing a context where teachers reflect, study and collaborate together.

In addition to the administrative support of teacher research, many teacher educators argue for providing a different type of support for the inquirers in the form of university-school collaboration (Atkins, 1994). Richardson (1994) admits that it is difficult to ignore the power and prestige that society has placed on the school district personnel and university academics. She maintains “we can not simply ‘empower’ teachers by handing total responsibility over to them, which is by itself a disempowering process” (p. 197). An alternative is that academics and schoolteachers collaborate where academics act as facilitators and support-agents for teacher-researchers, while the inquirers have the complete control over the process and the direction of their research.

Lieberman and Miller (1994), while supporting teacher research as a ‘pivotal’ research movement, are both cautious and believe that teacher research, as a solitary innovation has a poor chance for survival. Therefore, they recommend that the culture of inquiry should extend beyond the school itself. They discuss the importance of teachers’ networks as support systems, which provide opportunities for sharing ideas and promoting innovation.

To conclude, despite some researchers’ uncertainties of the power of teacher research to influence teaching practice, I believe, as a political movement, this mode of inquiry has the potential for bringing about change in the profession and within the school as an educational institution. Yet, we know that reform is a slow and uphill struggle. Along with Cole and Knowles (1997) and James (2001), I believe that individual and local change efforts, although slow, have greater impact than systematic top-down measures.
Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter I reviewed literature on teacher research and examined the different criticisms raised against teacher research as a worthwhile learning activity for practitioners. Most of the arguments come from pedagogues who have applied their own criteria for judging the effectiveness of teacher research and have excluded the teacher's own perspectives from their discussions. The critiques examined in this chapter were concerned with (1) the ability of teacher research to bring about significant improvement in practice, and (2) the ability of teachers to conduct systematic inquiry into their own practice. It should be noted that some of the points discussed by critics are valid but some of the concerns tend to contradict what teacher-researchers have reported so far concerning their views about research and its contribution to changing their professional life. Most of the teachers engaged in research and self-examination have reported favorable outcomes concerning the impact of research on their practice. Many have reported that teacher research can boost morale and self-confidence of the inquiring teachers (Roberts, 1993) and that involvement in research expands teachers' commitment to developing a variety of teaching methods and to keeping abreast of new information (Henson, 1996). Furthermore, doing research, as many teachers have reported (see, for example, Dadds, 1996) can lead to a development in the way teachers tackle problems. Through the act of reflecting upon practice, they acquire a range of cognitive abilities and develop what Elliott (1991) calls practical wisdom, the ability to discern the more successful action when confronted with complex and problematic situations.

Most of the studies reported so far describe teacher research and acknowledge the difficulties and challenges that researchers encounter in their endeavor. What is needed, perhaps, is to conduct further studies that aim at evaluating the impact of research on
individual teachers highlighting specific changes resulting from research inquiries as well as
the impact of such research upon students' learning.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research methodology used to investigate the process of teacher learning and professional development as a result of adopting teacher research as a professional development model. I will discuss the study design followed by a description of the research site, and the participants involved in the study. Next, I will discuss the methods employed for data collection and analysis procedures. Finally, I will discuss the researcher’s role and the ethical consideration related to conducting research in a familiar setting.

I. The design of the study

This study explores how teachers’ professional development and learning is enhanced through the process of engaging in systematic inquiry about their practice. The study adopts a qualitative mode and is informed by a ‘constructivist’ paradigm of research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The decision to choose a mode of inquiry, whether qualitative or quantitative, depends largely on the problem being investigated and the nature of the research questions being posed. In this study, where the phenomenon being studied is bound to, and derives its meaning from, a given context, and the focus is on meanings from participants’ perspectives, a qualitative mode of inquiry is believed to be most appropriate. Moreover, the decision to opt for a given paradigm depends on how its assumptions best serve the phenomenon or case being investigated. In this research, the attempt is to present the participants’ perspectives and constructs with regards to learning and development as a result of engaging in the research
process, a goal which resonates well with some of the basic assumptions underlying constructivism.

Choosing a mode of inquiry and a particular paradigm to guide a given study ultimately suggests the methods and techniques most suitable for collecting and analyzing data, and also define the researcher's role in that study. In qualitative case studies, interviews and participant observation are the most profitable and commonly used techniques for gathering data (Yin, 1994). Both techniques, however, are considered by researchers as situations for 'social interactions' involving the investigator and the respondents in a given context (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). In these situations, the interaction of the researcher with the participants is considered necessary to document the respondents' constructions (e.g., their beliefs, concerns, issues, assumptions). Therefore, in qualitative research (and in naturalistic research in particular), the researcher is not only the main instrument for collecting and analyzing data, but as Guba and Lincoln (1989) assert, is the only possible choice particularly during the early stages of the inquiry.

Furthermore, given the nature of the problem being investigated and the research questions asked in this study, I believe the quote below from Merriam (1988) supports the appropriateness of conducting the study in a qualitative mode and the significance of methods like interviewing for data collection. Merriam (1988) wrote:

naturalistic inquiry, which focuses on meaning in context, requires a data collection instrument sensitive to underlying meaning when gathering and interpreting data. Humans are best suited for this task and best when using methods that make use of human sensibilities such as interviewing, observing and analyzing. (p. 3)
II. Data Collection: Site, participants and sources of data

1. Site and participants:

This research project documents the process of learning and development of a group of four Bahraini EFL teachers who engaged in systematic investigation of their own practice. The group met regularly and engaged in a collaborative conversation, reflecting on their teaching and planning their actions. The purpose for their inquiry was to identify common problems or concerns they all share in their teaching and to implement certain strategies to improve their practice. These strategies were developed as a result of their collaborative investigation. The study was conducted in one of the girls' secondary school in the Kingdom of Bahrain (grades 10-12). The school is an all girl school with female administration since co-education is not the norm in the Kingdom. The selection of the school was based on an informal contact with the school principal as well as my personal experience as a senior teacher working with some of the EFL teachers in this school (during the in-service activities organized by the Ministry of Education). In addition, prior to approaching the whole English teaching staff in the above school, I had shared my interest in advocating teacher research as a professional development model with the head of the English department in this school who showed great interest and enthusiasm to support the study and participate in it. I believe the element of interest and willingness is crucial, particularly for this kind of research, which demands a lot of teachers’ time and commitment. I met with all EFL teachers at the beginning of the year and was given the opportunity to talk about my study. I used an invitational language rather than coercive one in my attempt to encourage teachers to take part in the research project. In supporting this, Nowlan (2001) reminds us that success in this
kind of projects is limited if the process is mandated, but is more successful if teachers take responsibility for planning and implementation themselves. A week later, I got a call from four of the teachers and we began our journey together.

2. Sources of data

The data were drawn from multiple sources, including individual interviews with the participants at the start and at the end of the project, audio recordings of the teachers’ group conversation during their regular meetings, a teacher questionnaire which obtained written responses from the participants regarding certain issues prior to and at the end of the school year, documents on students’ writing and the investigator’s own reflective journal. The length of the project was one full academic year; from September 1996 to September 1997.

2.1. Interviews

Qualitative interviews, Holstein and Gubrium (1995), write are collaborative enterprises. They argue that the interview is an active process during which both interviewer and interviewee are engaged in the process of constructing meaning. In this study, the intention was to obtain the participants’ views on the phenomenon under investigation. The interviews, it was felt, would provide the participants an opportunity to reveal their perceptions, concerns, attitudes and matters which are not easily obtained through alternative methods. Two semi-structured interviews were conducted in English with the participating teachers during the study. Hitchcock and Hughes (1989, p.83) describe semi-structured interviews as a process which,

allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe the interviewee’s responses... Some kind of balance between the interviewer and
the interviewee can develop which can provide room for negotiation, discussion, and expansion of the interviewee’s responses.

The advantage of the semi-structured interview is that the interviewer is in control of the process of obtaining information from the interviewee, but is also free to follow leads as they arise. The first teacher-interviews were conducted in Phase One of the study (from September through January) during which I was present in Bahrain for initiating the project and data collection. Patton (1987) advises that in qualitative interviews, good questions should be open-ended, neutral, sensitive and clear to the interviewee. He listed six types of questions that can be asked: those based on behavior or experience, on opinion or value, on feeling, on knowledge, on sensory experience, and those asking about background knowledge. Therefore, questions on the first teacher interviews were probing questions designed to provide an opportunity for the participants to reflect and disclose their personal views and feelings about their role as teachers as well as their understanding of their learning and development process. Thus the questions focused on the following topics:

1- Teachers’ conceptualization of professional development.
2- Teachers’ personal experience in teaching.
3- Teachers’ views concerning their own learning.

Although the same framework was used with all participants, I tried to be as open and as sensitive as possible to issues that each participant might raise during the course of interviews. Interviews were limited to 60 minutes and were conducted at the locations that teachers chose for their convenience. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions of the first teacher interviews were shared and discussed with the interviewee, which served both to clarify any ambiguities and as a member check technique. During the member check, each participant was presented with a transcript of her interview,
and was invited to make comments and any necessary clarifications. This I believe is essential to establish credibility with the respondents and obtain quality data.

The second interview was conducted at the end of the study, in September. I felt teacher researchers in this project were engaged in this mode of inquiry for the first time in their teaching profession. It was vital that enough time be allowed for the process to develop and for the teachers to get a clear conception of what they were engaged in. Therefore, questions in the second interviews were directed towards issues related to investigating one’s practice and being able to assess the process in terms of:

1- Factors that supported or hindered this practice.

2- The impact of teacher inquiries upon the participants’ own learning.

3- The impact of teacher research upon students’ learning.

2.2. Group meetings

In addition to the interviews, I participated (as a participant observer) in the teachers’ regular meetings in Phase One of the project. The teachers’ meetings were conducted weekly, during which participants discussed and reflected upon the research process. The group’s collaborative conversations were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis in order to provide more insights into the whole process. These collaborative conversations were more than informative chats (Hollingsworth, 1994) and provided a context where teachers shared their practice-based concerns, and constructed a shared understanding of their teaching. Feldman (1999, p.132) views conversation as a dialectical process as the participants share knowledge, understanding and concerns. As a research method, conversation is purposeful in facilitating communication among teachers and helps them make decisions about their
actions and generate understanding of their practice. Teachers' group meetings in Phase Two of the study continued monthly in my absence and the audiotapes of these meetings were sent to me for transcriptions and feedback through a group coordinator. The group coordinator was selected by the teachers themselves who acted as a contact between the investigator and the group during my absence in Canada, by means of letters and electronic mail.

2.3. Teachers’ questionnaire

Initially, I had planned to conduct interviews with participants in the middle of the research project in order to get some feedback on their views concerning their experience of conducting research and issues and concerns related to this endeavor. This, however, was not possible since I had to return to UBC to attend to other obligations. Therefore, an open-ended questionnaire was developed and sent to teachers to get their written responses as part of the data for the study. The questions aimed to explore the following:

1. What aspects of the project are considered significant by the participants.
2. The role of collaborative inquiry in enhancing the participants’ teaching.
3. The type of support that teachers received from colleagues or school administration.

The table below summarizes the various stages and illustrates the key events in the study.
(Table 1) A timeline representing the main events in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>* Prepared consent forms</td>
<td>September 1st-20th, 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Obtained permission from the Ministry of Education to conduct the study</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in the selected school.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Made initial contact with potential participants.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* First meeting with the whole EFL staff: Content: description of the study</td>
<td>September 22nd, 1996</td>
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<td></td>
<td>and its aims</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase One (Researcher is</td>
<td>* Meeting with the participants. Content: the nature of the project and the</td>
<td>October 2nd, 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>present in Bahrain)</td>
<td>participants’ roles.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Workshop #1: Introduced Teacher Research and methods of data collection.</td>
<td>October 9th, 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gave out some reference material for further reading.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Meeting with the school principal #1: discussed the project and informed</td>
<td>October 9th, 1996</td>
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<td></td>
<td>her about the teachers’ responsibilities.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>* Meeting with the senior teacher individually: discussed some concerns.</td>
<td>October 14th, 1996</td>
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<td></td>
<td>* Workshop #2: Continued discussion on methods of collecting data and planned</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>the structure of the teachers’ meetings.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Workshop #3: Responding to teachers’ inquiries on issues related to</td>
<td>October 21st, 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>conducting research.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Meeting with the principal #2: Briefing about the research procedures.</td>
<td>October 28th, 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Meeting with the group: Discussed the research procedures and my role in</td>
<td>October 29th, 1996</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

66
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase One (Researcher is present in Bahrain)</th>
<th>research procedures and my role in the process.</th>
<th>November 5th, 1996.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Teachers’ Group Meeting #2. Content of discussion: Selecting the research topic and planning.</td>
<td>November 19th, 1996.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Teachers’ Group Meeting #3. Content of discussion: Implementing writing strategies.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Teachers’ Group Meeting #4. Content of discussion: Issues related to how to cope with the writing techniques introduced.</td>
<td>November 21st, 1996.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>* Teacher Interview #1: with Nasreen.</td>
<td>December 2nd, 1996.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>* Teacher Interview #1: with Shaima.</td>
<td>December 10th, 1996.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Teacher Interview #1: with Hanadi.</td>
<td>December 10th, 1996.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Teacher Interview #1: with Mona</td>
<td>January 1997.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Teachers' Group Meeting #7.  
Content of discussion: Reflection on the research process: Obstacles  
*Member check | January 14th, 1997.  
January 26, 28, February 8, 1997. |
|---|---|
| **Phase Two**  
(researcher returns to UBC) |  
*Teachers' Group Meeting #8.  
Content of discussion: Modifying the technique.  
*Teachers’ Group Meeting #9.  
Content of discussion: Evaluating their own learning.  
*Teachers’ Group Meeting #10.  
Content of discussion: Developing student questionnaire.  
Teachers Questionnaire e-mailed.  
Content: Personal assessment of the inquiry process.  
Conducted the second set of teachers’ interviews.  
Content: Assessment and reflection of the whole experience.  
Teacher interview #2. (Mona)  
Teacher interview #2. (Hanadi)  
Teacher interview #2. (Nasreen)  
Teacher interview #2. (Shaima) | March 12th, 1997.  
April 10th, 1997.  
May 29th, 1997.  
September 1997.  
September 22nd, 1997.  
September 22nd, 1997.  
September 22nd, 1997.  
October 4th, 1997 |
III. Data Analysis

Marshall and Roseman (1995) define analyzing qualitative data as "the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data" (p.111). Qualitative data analysis is often described as a messy and a complex process (Yin, 1989; Miriam, 1988). Literature has identified various techniques for analyzing qualitative data. The use of these techniques depends on the dimension, which the study wishes to take. For instance, Goetz and Le Compte (1981) explain that most studies array along four dimensions. These are inductive- deductive, generation- verification, construction- enumeration, and subjective-objective. Lincoln and Guba (1985) see these dimensions as a continuum with inductive, generative, constructive and subjective at one end and deductive, verificatory, enumerative and objective at the other end of this continuum. Using this continuum, these authors have discussed five analytic techniques for data processing. These are: (1) Analytic induction, (2) Pure analytic induction, (3) Typological analysis, (4) Enumeration, and (5) Standardized observational protocols. The first two techniques are particularly suitable to analyze data in studies, which tend toward inductive, generative, constructive and subjective end, whereas the other three are designed for studies which fall along the other end of the continuum.

The study reported is a qualitative case study, which seeks to explore how teachers' professional development is enhanced through the process of engaging in systematic inquiry about their practice. In addition, it attempts to investigate how the participating teachers view the impact of their learning upon their students. I believe that in naturalistic inquiry, the inquirer is involved in the process of generating theory from the data obtained rather than verifying prior assumptions about teacher learning within the context of self initiated effort for in service improvement. Participants or actors in the study have their own perspectives
and interpretations. As researchers, we are required to learn what we can of these perspectives and incorporate them into our own. I believe that the procedures of the constant comparative method, advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) enable the researcher to systematically detect these multiple perspectives. What is really important in this study is the attempt to uncover the participants' perspectives and concerns and learn from their stories.

Data analysis was a continuous process throughout the research project. I reviewed the data from the various sources looking for instances of teacher learning and professional development. As a result, the following themes emerged which are related to the research questions posed in this study:

1. Exploring teachers' views.
2. The role of feedback in coping with innovation and change.
3. Developing awareness and tolerance toward different perspectives.
4. Strategies to cope with innovation.
5. Developing awareness of own context.

These themes are related to the first two research questions, which examine how teacher research was conceptualized and enacted and contributed to teachers' learning and professional growth. They explored social issues (i.e. dilemmas, frustrations etc.) related to this process.

The evidence on teacher learning comes from the analysis of interviews, teachers' responses to the questionnaire as well as transcripts of the group conversations. I also analyzed the documents that were made available to me by the teachers as evidence of students' improvement in the writing skills (these were writing samples and students' responses to a questionnaire designed by the writing teachers). I have discussed these issues under the following themes:
1. Improvement of quality of writing: students' perspectives.

2. Improvement of quality of writing: teachers' perspectives.

3. Improvement of students' attitudes toward writing.

Each of these themes generated categories that were identified as different aspects of learning and are further elaborated upon in chapter six.

Due to the recursive nature of the qualitative research (Miriam, 1988; Yin, 1989), checking out each transcribed interview with the participants for example is helpful both as a member check technique as well as a strategy to inform the investigator if there is a need for more data to be collected to clarify certain issues. When possible, the participants were given the opportunity to take part in the analysis and interpretation of the data to some extent. During my presence in Bahrain, the participants were given the transcription of the first teacher interview and were encouraged to review and comment upon the issues raised in the interviews. They were able to confirm some of my understandings and provide further clarification or comments. This process engaged us in interesting conversations during which the participants were given the opportunity to clarify, expand and reflect further in the issues discussed in the interview. This process was significant because it aimed at presenting a joint construction of meaning.

IV. The Researcher's Role

In a qualitative study, the researcher is very much an actor in the sense of taking an active rather than a passive role during the study (Acker, 1999). As a researcher, I had multiple roles in the context of the research project. Initially, I was in Bahrain during the first phase of the project. As an advocate of teacher research as an alternative mode of teacher learning and
professional development, my role was naturally that of a facilitator and, to a certain extent, a consultant. The project was an innovative experience in the Bahraini context, as I introduced teacher research through a number of workshop sessions that were geared toward informing practitioners of the different forms of investigating one’s practice, collecting data and learning how to become teacher-researchers, and providing material. This was an important part of the process, considering the fact that these teachers had not been previously exposed to other than traditional top-down forms of professional development. As McKernan (1990) advises, it is not enough to call on teachers to conduct research, but we need to make sure that the practitioners understand and possess research skills, which would generate appropriate data. This role of facilitator continued throughout the study and I believe it was a significant and a crucial role within this context. It has been argued that in order to sustain the process, teacher researchers need a lot of support from critical friends, school administration and colleagues (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Furthermore, although Bahraini teachers identified with me as a former teacher myself, they also viewed me as a researcher coming from an academic institution with a certain type of knowledge and therefore naturally expected some forms of intervention. I was aware and acknowledged the significance of my role as a facilitator and a ‘critical friend’, yet I struggled with the degree of intervention- as a consultant- in the whole process. As a passionate believer in teacher research, I felt teachers needed full ownership of the process. This included realizing my own limits by not imposing any pace or rigor and acknowledging that teacher inquiry is a sophisticated mode of learning, and that teacher researchers need to go through the process naturally, grappling with its demands, concepts and constraints. This, I believe, is based on the assumption that knowledge construction is social, and learners need to interact to be able to construct their
own knowledge about their practice, which included the engagement in this inquiry process. For this reason, the initial workshops and sessions that I conducted at the early stage focused upon methods of inquiring into practice and provided them with materials that they could refer to and which provided some easy steps on how to inquire into one's practice. It should be clarified that these efforts basically aimed at introducing the concept and method of conducting teacher research to the participants and at no time I am assuming that these activities, by themselves, are sufficient for participants to fully understand and employ such professional development mode in a meaningful way. For that to occur, teachers need to go through the process and construct their own meaning for what teacher research is and how it could be enacted within a particular context.

In addition to my role as a facilitator and a consultant, I was also a participant observer during the first phase of the project. According to McKernan (1990), participant observation is the practice of doing research by “joining in the life of the social group or institution that is being researched.” (p. 63). In this sense, the researcher has a twofold goal, to take on the role of a participant in a setting and to inquire into the ethnographic nature of the setting. Through participation, the researcher gets the feel of what it is like to be an actor in the social situation and able to appreciate and understand the behavior of the participants closely. This role, I believe, enables the investigator to observe and document in detail how the group negotiated the meaning of how they understood the process of systematic inquiry and also provides a rich description of the setting. As an external researcher, I facilitated the group meetings, took care of the recording but the content of the discussions was determined by the teachers themselves. Ideally I would have liked to maintain this role throughout the study but
unfortunately this was not feasible, as I had to go back to UBC and continue with my other obligations.

It is also important to acknowledge my position as someone conducting research in a familiar setting. I believe that familiarity with the context, and the ease of access to school as a site enhances the credibility and strength of this research. I had known the school principal, the senior teacher, and the EFL teachers for some time and this familiarity also contributed to a large extent in creating a comfortable research environment and enabled me to adopt the different roles that this research required. Furthermore, it has enabled me to provide a clear description and discussion of the Bahraini context with its own unique culture of teaching and schooling. This would certainly enable readers from a different culture to appreciate and understand the teachers’ effort to conduct inquiry into their practice.

V. Ethical Issues

I explained the aim, and purpose of the research and all data gathering procedures and assured participants of confidentiality. In this study, the identities of the participants were kept strictly confidential. I was particularly careful of disclosing elements that might jeopardize the participants’ careers. Although the teacher-researchers in this study were identified in their own school, efforts were made not to disclose their identities beyond the school level. One of the important ethical issues that Cole and Knowles (1997) have pointed out is the question of how information can be presented in a way that does not place the participants at risk. During the interviews, teachers raised certain sensitive issues while critiquing educational system. While reading the transcripts I felt that the others within or outside school might not tolerate some of these issues. I have been aware of these issues in
reporting the study, especially given the fact that these participants are working within a system in which practitioners lack the real opportunity to voice issues of their concern or critique the organizational structure of their work context. Therefore, in reporting the study, I decided to omit some of these discussions.

**Summary**

This chapter presented an overview of the methodology used in the study. Details about the design of the study including data sources, procedures for data analysis as well as the researcher's role and ethical issues were discussed. The following chapters present a discussion of how teacher research was enacted as a professional development mode and explore the impact of this approach on teacher and student learning.
CHAPTER 5

TEACHING, LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

INTRODUCING THE PARTICIPANTS AND EXPLORING TEACHERS' VIEWS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe briefly how the research group was formed, and then using the data from the teachers’ first interview to illustrate how teachers conceptualized professional development at the beginning of the study. I have relied on the teachers’ responses to the issues raised in the interview to generate an understanding of how they understood their roles as teachers, and what teacher development meant to them. It should be pointed out that although it was my intention to conduct the first teacher interview at the beginning of the study, unfortunately, because of the teachers’ involvement with many activities related to coping with the idea of doing research and their efforts to get to know how to cope with its demands, the decision to conduct the initial interview was postponed. The following discussion is based on the data gathered from the first teacher interview conducted between November and December 1996.

I. Getting together

I had discussed the idea of forming a teacher-research group with one of my colleagues who was a senior teacher in a secondary school. She found the idea intriguing and, thinking of her annual plan for staff development, she thought that this research project might contribute to her staff development and create a different community in the school. So, in the first staff meeting at the beginning of the year, I was introduced to the
group and given some time to talk about my research and my interest in teacher development. I invited the teachers to participate in the project and made it clear that their decision to continue with the project entirely depended on them and on their willingness to be part of such a project. Initially, I felt anxious and concerned that teachers might feel obliged to participate. The idea of doing research on their own practice is an innovative concept, and one that is very uncommon in the Bahraini context. Many of the decisions, with regards to teachers' in-service needs are made on a top-down basis. Teacher development (or training as it is usually referred to in Bahrain) is viewed as a process whereby teachers learn and change as a result of an intervention from external agents. Therefore, it was crucial for me to clarify the nature of the teachers' commitment towards this project, which would focus on their own efforts to investigate their practices. I felt relieved when after my presentation they seemed willing and interested in participating in the project. After some discussions, I encouraged them to think about the project and contact me if they wanted to discuss the project or had reached a decision to engage in this new endeavor.

A week later, I got calls from four out of eight of the teachers from the English staff. The volunteers were all women, since co-education of children and teachers is not a policy in the Bahraini system. I then planned a series of workshops during which we met and I introduced issues related to teachers doing research on their own practice. We discussed action research, as one example of inquiry, which has become very common among teachers elsewhere around the world. I presented Elliot (1991) and McKernan's (1991) model of action research as an example and got the teachers' feedback on these models. I gave each teacher a copy of British Columbia Ministry of Education Handbook
(Field-Based Research: A Working Guide, 1992) for conducting teacher research to provide some guidance and practical tips of how to initiate their own inquiry into practice.

During the workshop sessions, we had the opportunity to discuss what doing research meant to the group. They saw me as an advocate of teacher research, and they asked many questions. I felt these sessions were exploratory for all of us. They were learning about teacher research and I was learning about their views and concerns. Most of all, the teachers’ questions centered around the technical aspect of doing research, such as, gathering data, analyzing data, time factors, etc.

I found these meetings very informative. I learned a great deal about the group, and found out how keen and committed they were about their own learning. In our last session, I invited the group to think about the procedural aspect of their work and decide on the structure of their group meetings. They decided to have bi-weekly meetings to discuss the aspects of their research and get feedback from each other. They raised the concern of finding a regular time for their meetings and their senior teacher proposed to allocate one of her weekly staff meetings every two weeks to teacher research instead of conducting a whole staff meeting as planned in their school timetable. Once this was specified, teachers felt relieved and then started planning for their first meeting. I explained to the teachers that my role would be that of the participant observer in the meetings and volunteered to act as a secretary and organize their meetings for the period I was in Bahrain. I explained that my presence in the meetings was mainly for the purpose of collecting data (in my case writing my own journal) and not to give comments or interfere with their decisions. I was very conscious of giving the group the full ownership
of the process rather than acting as an outsider who might be tempted to intervene and tell the teachers how to run their own research. I also explained that I would be sitting with the group during their meetings and would try to be a good listener with minimum intervention. This, I felt was important for the group to understand. My aim was not to impose any particular structure on teacher researchers, but rather to act as a facilitator, a good listener, a supporter and above all a caring friend, but definitely not to be viewed as an expert who would tell them what to do. Although, as I now reflect back on the whole process, I feel there were times that teachers wanted me to play a more active role, and had certain expectations from me as a graduate student from an institution in a North American context.

Teaching is an activity that is embedded within a set of culturally bound assumptions about teaching, teachers and learners. These assumptions reflect what the teachers’ responsibility is believed to be, how student learning is conceptualized and how students are expected to interact in the classroom. In the next section, I will introduce the four EFL female participants in this study. The discussion will focus on the following issues:

- How participants view their roles as teachers.
- How they conceptualize teacher learning and professional development.

II. Shaima’s Path

Shaima is an experienced teacher who has been teaching EFL for twenty years. She has a Master’s Degree in her subject area and has formed different views about teaching and learning throughout her profession.
Shaima’s conception of her role as a teacher:

At the beginning of my career I considered myself as a learner who was learning by trial and error. I was confident; at least I thought I was, until I entered the classroom. I felt my language wasn’t good enough but I thought I was fine. I was actually learning to teach, and I still am. (Teacher interview #1, Dec. 96).

For some cultures, learning involves mastering a body of knowledge that is presented by the teacher to the students. Both teacher and learners are concerned with the end product; that is, they expect the learner to eventually reproduce the knowledge in the same form as the teacher presented it to them. Shaima’s view of her role corresponds to this vision of learning and explains:

At the beginning of my teaching, I viewed my role as a teacher, as a source of knowledge and information. I had to know everything and students had to come back to me for everything. I used to spoon feed them with whatever information they needed. (Teacher interview #1, Dec. 96).

This conception of the teacher as transmitter of knowledge assumes certain expectations from the learners. As Shaima explains, learners are there simply to get the knowledge from the teacher and have little responsibility in the direction that their learning takes place. For Shaima, however, this conception changed as she gained more experience in her teaching. After a number of years of teaching, she was given the opportunity to do her graduate studies in a western context. She reflects:

When I came back and started teaching again I started looking at things differently. My expectations and thoughts are different now. And as a result of the change in my own views, I’ve become a different teacher. I am trying to be a facilitator although, sometimes I fall into old habits but I keep trying not to. So now I see myself as a learning facilitator rather than a dominant teacher. (Teacher interview #1, Dec. 96)
Shaima’s views about her role as a teacher and her attitude towards her students’ learning has undergone various changes during her teaching profession. As Shaima expressed, teachers create their own role within the classroom based on their views of teaching and learning and personal interpretation of what works best for their students. In fact, for some teachers, their view about themselves and about teaching and learning is not static, but rather changes as a result of experience and interaction with others. In Shaima’s case, perhaps as a result of exposure to a different culture of teaching, this conception was modified and led to a change in the way students learning was understood, and consequently her role as a teacher was altered.

Shaima’s views about teacher’s in-service professional development:

Like many other contexts, in-service teacher development in Bahrain is viewed as basically the need to provide training courses for teachers, usually focusing on improving teacher’s pedagogical knowledge. In some cases, teachers are sent to the university to do diploma courses. In the case of the English as foreign language teachers, many of them are mandated to attend language courses to improve their proficiency in that area. It is assumed that once teachers develop language competence, their teaching will improve as a result. However, practicing teachers conceptualize their learning and development differently. Shaima’s own experience is one example: “The assumptions underlying these training courses are that once teachers are introduced to new ideas, these ideas will be implemented automatically.”
But in reality this is not the case, and has led to teacher resistance to change. In Shaima’s view, this is related to a number of factors:

1. **The organization of these short courses.**

   Many of the teacher development courses focus upon introducing teachers to textbooks that are used in teaching. The focus is usually on how others, in this case curriculum experts, see the process of implementing certain methodologies. Mostly, teachers do not have any input into the process of developing such programs and are generally uninvolved in determining their development needs.

2. **Conceptualization of teacher development.**

   Those involved in teacher training usually demand specific changes in the teachers’ practices. They are unaware of how teachers react to such efforts. New ideas bring about tension and insecurity. Teachers have different priorities when it comes to actual learning. Many such externally driven attempts do not take teachers’ agendas into account. As a result, teachers mostly regard these efforts as fruitless.

   According to Shaima, two important factors are not being considered in designing teacher development programs. The first is the teachers’ involvement in the process. Teachers are usually not approached to have input into the nature of such programmes or decide on their actual content. It is usually an outsider’s perspective, which determines what teachers ought to learn in these courses and the courses are based on the assumption that there are certain deficit in teachers’ practices that need to be corrected. Another factor is related to the time element. Many of the staff development courses are usually that of “one-shot” type, which assume that practical problems can be solved by providing teachers quick solutions. In introducing change,
time is a crucial factor. Teachers need time to understand the change process, cope with it and see the value of its implementation. Yet, many teacher development programmes do not build this aspect into their programmes and as a result teachers who are expected to adopt change experience frustration as they are rushed to alter their practices. In response to these factors, Shaima thus believes:

Teacher’s personal development should be given priorities. As a senior teacher, I am trying to look at the process differently. It is important to encourage teachers to act as professionals and to initiate or lead their own professional improvement. (Teacher interview #1, Dec. 1996)

III. Mona’s Path

Mona, a graduate from Bahrain University, has been teaching since 1987. She started her career by teaching children at the primary level, and five years later, she was transferred to a secondary school where she has taught various grades since then. Like Shaima, Mona’s first years of teaching involved trying to implement all that she had learned in the university. She explains,

I couldn’t apply everything I was taught however. As years went by, I developed my own personal approach and adjusted it to the type of learners I got each year. At the beginning, I felt I lacked confidence but things got better as I gained more experience. Now in the secondary school, I am more competent. I feel I know my students better. My lesson plans are different and I am more relaxed when I enter the classroom. (Teacher interview #1, Jan. 97)

Mona’s understanding of her role reflects her personal view of teaching. At the beginning of her career, her teaching corresponded to the way she had been asked to teach within a framework or philosophy established by the institution where she received her pre-service education. Through years of experience, however, Mona’s
Mona's conception of her role as a teacher

For many teachers, their own experience as students has a major influence on their philosophy about teaching and learning. Mona admits this and maintains,

... As a student myself, I depended a lot on the teacher. But nowadays students are different. They want to do more. They contribute to their learning, even the weak students. This creates a challenging situation for all of us teachers. Students are learning cooperatively to some extent, and this has affected the way I teach or the way I view my role as a teacher. (Teacher interview #1, Jan. 97)

Mona's view about in-service professional development.

As many other English as a foreign language teachers (EFL), Mona has attended most of the in-service training sessions and courses designed and offered by the ministry of education. As Shaima explained earlier, most of these short courses and workshops were related to introducing textbooks (which is usually conducted by the publisher of the series adopted for teaching English). Other courses are designed to improve the teachers' language skills and they are mandatory for teachers who are tested and do not perform according to the accepted Ministry standards. Mona feels that although the kind of information they get from such activities is useful in some
ways, what teachers need should be more related to their development needs. According to Mona:

... Teaching a new curriculum is not a big deal. As teachers, we learn from our experience and need time to implement ideas. I feel some of these efforts are useful in some ways but what we need is more than attending these short sessions on how to teach a certain textbook. We need the opportunity and the time to learn on our own and develop ourselves. (Teacher interview #1, Jan.97)

Mona’s approach for working on her own development is based on collaboration and learning from her colleagues. She usually visits her colleagues’ classes and talks to them. She explains:

I talk to other teachers and discuss how they prepare their teaching material. Some of them usually invite me to their classes. I find their comments very useful, especially the more experienced teachers. We share ideas, and I benefit from this experience more than attending seminars or workshops, which have very limited usefulness to me. (Teacher interview #1, Jan.97)

She further maintains:

In school, I am with the teachers all the time and we talk about our teaching, our worries and our students. I learn more at school from my colleagues. They give me continuous feedback and as a result I’ve learned more about myself as a teacher and about my personal needs for learning. (Teacher interview #1, Jan.97)

It should be pointed out that initially, Mona was not part of the research group but she decided to join the group by the end of the first semester. In our informal interview, I was curious and intrigued. I wanted to know why she had decided to join the others in the middle of the project and Mona explains:

I’ve seen Shaima, Hanadi and Nasreen very excited about the project and the strategies they’ve been trying out with their students. They talk about their students all the time and how they’ve become more eager to write in English. I feel that I want to be part of this learning experience and enjoy my teaching. (Teacher interview #1, Jan.97)
Mona’s decision to join the group is significant and points positively to the influence of the research group in providing a rich environment for learning. Her attitude is also an indicative of the curiosity for learning that pervades Mona’s practice. Her statements reflect that, since the beginning of her teaching, Mona has seen herself as a learner along with her students. This attitude is significant and explains her eagerness to improve her teaching as a result of the positive changes she witnessed in her colleagues who were investigating their practice and reporting positive attitudes as a result of implementing different ideas to improve their teaching.

IV. Nasreen’s Path

Another enthusiastic teacher in the group is Nasreen. Nasreen is a veteran teacher who has been teaching over forty years, yet her enthusiasm and passion for teaching and learning is similar to that of a new teacher entering the classroom for the first time. Nasreen is an expatriate who has lived in Bahrain since 1957. She is energetic and eager to learn and her journey to become a teacher goes a long way back. In her words,

When I finished high school, my father wanted me to become a secretary. When he found out that I wanted to become a teacher, he refused to pay for my education. Luckily, the school principal suggested that I convince my dad to pay for one year of my education. The principal explained that I would become a primary teacher then I can work and do independent study. First, I thought it was not practical, but then I decided I didn’t have any other choice. So I did my teacher training course and then got a job as a teacher in a primary school. (Teacher interview #1, Dec. 96)
Nasreen later on moved to Bahrain with her husband to work. She started teaching in 1963, a time when not many Bahrainis specialized in teaching English. Teaching, according to Nasreen was the only possible option for her at that time so she became an EFL teacher. Since then, she has taught various levels of schooling. She now teaches the secondary level (grades 10-12) and has accumulated a wealth of experience at all levels.

Nasreen’s conception of her role as a teacher

Reflecting back on her long years of teaching, Nasreen feels that not only are students different nowadays; she herself has undergone a lot of changes since the beginning of her teaching career. In retrospect, she recalls,

It’s amazing how students have changed. When I started to teach, what girls cared about was getting married and starting a family. Perhaps this was the case because they had restricted choices not only in education but also in careers. Nowadays, however, students have changed and become more conscious about the way they learn and earn grades. (Teacher interview #1, Dec. 96).

Nasreen’s view of her role as a teacher is closely related to her experience of being a mother. She describes herself as a mother, a learner, and a facilitator of learning and firmly believes that learning is a joint endeavor in which teachers and learners both share the responsibility to facilitate such experiences. She adds, “I tell my students I’m not going to do the learning for you. I tell them I don’t know everything. I need to learn with you.” (Teacher interview #1, Dec. 96).
Nasreen’s view of in-service professional development

According to Nasreen, back in the 1950s or 1960s, there weren’t any training programs designed specifically for EFL teachers. The issue of teacher development was not very much emphasized in the past. There were no opportunities for in-service courses. But nowadays, teachers’ professional development has received some recognition. However, it is still seen in terms of doing more courses or getting higher degrees and qualifications. The focus of the ministry is upon the academic preparation of teachers. Many of the teacher-training sessions focus upon telling teachers how to teach certain textbooks, in addition to the effort of encouraging teachers to obtain higher qualifications in subject specific areas. What Nasreen has described is certainly typical of how teacher development is viewed in many educational contexts. In many cases, sending teachers back to the university is viewed as the main approach to in-service development. The assumption is that the increased knowledge of the subject matter would create better teachers. Perhaps this is true for some teachers and university courses might, to a large extent, offer an excellent venue for learning (in the sense of gaining knowledge about the subject matter) but in reality for many others the actual learning takes place in the context of teaching and in classrooms. Nasreen seems to see her development in this manner:

My idea of professional development is the opportunity to learn as a teacher. I don’t mind changing my methods of teaching or doing anything new, provided I get results. I don’t want to stick to the old. It may be the best but I like experimenting with ideas. To me, teaching is always researching for what works best for my students.

(Teacher interview #1, Dec. 96)
V. Hanadi’s Path

14 years ago, Hanadi graduated from one of the Arabian universities. She started her teaching in an intermediate school, and taught at this level for two years. She was then transferred to a secondary school and has been teaching this level since then. As Hanadi reflects on her beginning years, it seems that choosing to become a teacher was not her first option. She explains:

I was pushed to become a teacher. My parents, like many other parents in our society, believed that teaching is the most suitable job for women, especially for our context since women teach only female students. I've grown to like my teaching, however, despite the fact that I never thought of it as my life long profession. (Teacher interview #1, Dec. 96)

Hanadi’s conception of her role as a teacher:

Hanadi believes that she has gained more confidence in herself and in her ability as a teacher as a result of the knowledge and experience she has gained from the profession. Upon reflection on her first years of teaching she says:

I found it was very difficult for me to face students. But now as a result of my long years of teaching, I've become more competent and feel I've changed a lot as a person and as a teacher. Now, I've the courage to say and do things differently. (Teacher interview #1, Dec. 96)

Therefore, Hanadi sees herself as a more competent teacher whose practical knowledge has enhanced her ability to develop as a person and as a teacher. The knowledge she has gained from the experience has empowered her; in the sense that she now feels she is able to set the direction for student learning. The courage she has gained is reflected in her power to manage the classroom environment and in her
ability to do things differently, depending upon her understanding of her classroom's needs.

Hanadi's view about teachers' in-service professional development:

Like many other Bahraini teachers, Hanadi's experience with professional development activities is based on attending all seminars or short courses organized by the Directorate of Curricula in the Ministry of Education. The focus has always been upon enabling teachers to cope with a new series of textbooks that the ministry has usually adopted for teaching English as a foreign language in secondary schools. In Hanadi's opinion, some of these sessions were useful but there is always the problem of time. A short-term course or a one-day workshop rarely provides enough time to understand the complexities of classroom teaching. She, however, recalls a more positive experience she had a few years ago when the Directorate of Curricula arranged a one-year teacher development program in conjunction with a leading publishing company, which produces most of the Bahraini EFL textbooks. This one-year teacher development program consisted of bi-weekly sessions organized for secondary school teachers. In response to my question why she considered the program successful, Hanadi explains that it provided teachers with more time to talk and discuss issues related to teaching and learning. Furthermore, the programme designers had approached the teachers in order to specify the topics for the program and she felt the most powerful aspect of the programme was the opportunity to discuss and exchange ideas with other colleagues from various other schools around the country.
From Hanadi’s perspective, professional development refers to the teacher’s effort to improve him/herself, always through different means. But this however has not been the norm. She explains, “I feel it’s not always possible. We rarely get enough time to experience this in school. Mostly, we’re busy teaching rather than having the time to think about teaching or our own learning.” (Teacher interview #1, Dec. 96)

Hanadi also feels that teachers’ professional development should not be the responsibility of the ministry of education alone. She believes that teacher development is everyone’s responsibility. It is, however, useful if the ministry arranged the conditions for it to take place in schools or helped the teachers who work on their own. It is certainly not the teacher’s responsibility alone. In-service development to Hanadi is the opportunity to have conversations with her colleagues in order to exchange experiences and learn from each other. Hanadi also reacts with disappointment to her experience with supervisors who normally come to school to observe teachers and discuss their lessons. The goal is usually to give teachers the necessary feedback so that they can improve the way they teach. She feels discussions might be a useful aspect of the process but they do not necessarily lead to teacher change. She clarifies:

In my view, talking to my colleagues is different. They’re in the same field, not outsiders. Supervisors are not with me in the school or in my classroom. They only come once or twice a year basically for the purpose of evaluation. But teachers are different. They are more helpful because they are in the same environment and are in classrooms everyday. We even speak the same language and share a lot of problems. (Teacher interview #1, Dec. 96)

Developing self-knowledge is an important aspect of teacher development.

Gaining self-knowledge, according to Pollard and Trigg (1997) is something, which
develops when teachers reflect and recall experiences that are significant and have an impact upon their teaching practice. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of analyzing self involves considering how we see or conceptualize our role as teachers. For Hanadi, being a teacher means being something quite different now after 13 years of teaching. She maintains:

When I started teaching, students were very different and had different expectations. They saw me as the only person who knew everything and who could tell them what to do. But now they have changed a lot. They are more competent, they ask questions, discuss and have more expectations. These changes have contributed to some extent to the way I see myself as a teacher and the way I act and behave in the classroom. Years back I used to spoon feed my students but now, students are more active. I encourage students to depend on themselves and take risks. My role is now observing, guiding and helping students whenever they need but I am certainly not spoon-feeding anymore. I see my role as facilitator. One of my responsibilities as a teacher is to prepare students for the future, and I can only do this by involving them in the learning process. (Teacher interview #1, Dec. 96)

Summarizing comments:

Reflecting on each teacher's path clearly shows that most teachers enter the teaching profession with certain assumptions about teaching and learning and understand their role as a reflection of this concept or act in a way to correspond to this notion. In previous studies conducted by Goodson (1992) and Nias (1989), this sense of self was so strong that many teachers saw themselves as persons-in-teaching rather than simply teachers. Pollard and Trigg (1997) argue that this sense of self and its relationship with the conceptualization of one's role as a teacher is significant in teacher's personal development and the extent to which an individual teacher is open and willing to change. The process of reflecting on oneself or one's role is an
important aspect of gaining self-knowledge, a process that is considered an important aspect of the professional development process.

In this chapter, I have tried to present images of each teacher-researcher, how she understands her role as a teacher and learns about her views about in-service learning and professional development. Upon examination of the insights gained from each teacher, it becomes evident that most teachers enter their profession with a vision of what teaching and learning means to them. For these teachers, the act of reflecting on one’s self, and exploring their values and concepts seems to play a significant part of understanding their roles and hence the way they teach their students as they have progressed through their teaching years.

It is worth mentioning that by the time I was able to conduct the first teacher interview, the participants were already engaged in investigating their practice. However, it is evident from the participants’ input that we are dealing with experienced and knowledgeable individuals who are potentially ready and eager to explore a different mode of professional development. Once introduced to the concept of teacher research as an alternative approach to teacher development, the participants agreed willingly to be part of this endeavor and I did not feel that the concept of teachers as researchers was alien to them. As they expressed in our conversation, they were dissatisfied with the traditional format of in-service teacher development and found it of limited usefulness in bringing about significant change in their practice. These one-size-fits-all forms of staff development is not what many teachers feel are suitable to their actual needs in school teaching nor do they reflect the real story of how these teachers learn or want to learn. As the participants expressed, what they
really need is a form of professional development activity that provides teachers with the opportunity to learn continuously and sustain the process. They need to be able to act as professionals and reflect on issues related to their teaching in order to enhance their practice, within the context of their practice.

The next chapter will explore how teacher research facilitated teacher growth and development. It further explores how the participants struggled to cope with the challenges of doing research on their practice.
CHAPTER 6

TEACHER GROWTH: UNDERSTANDING ONE’S OWN PRACTICE AND CONTEXT.

The discussions that lead up to the creation of the vision are a form of professional development and adult learning that generates a sense of “ownership” of new ideas and practices, rather than mere program “buy-in.” Tony Wagner (2001, p.56)

Introduction

Professional growth is usually enhanced through exchange, critique, exploration and formulation of new ideas in a collaborative context. It is a social experience during which teachers learn through the process of investigating what they teach and how they teach. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the process of teachers’ professional development as evidenced in this case study. I will discuss this process in two parts. First, I will discuss and analyze my own interpretation of the various aspects of development, which emerged from the data. Then, in the next chapter, I will present an analysis of the participants’ own perspective of their own learning and development and finally, how such a learning process facilitated the improved learning conditions for their students.

As I studied the transcripts of the teachers’ group conversations, a number of themes emerged which illustrate the different aspects of professional development. These themes are:

1. The role of feedback in managing and understanding innovation and dealing with change.
2. Developing awareness and tolerance towards different perspectives.
3. Employing strategies to cope with innovation.
4. Developing awareness of the context.

I will deal with each theme in the sections that follow in order to present a holistic image
of how teachers struggled with doing research and understood the process of change associated with doing research and consequently how they developed their practice.

I. The role of feedback in managing innovation and dealing with change

Innovation in education is defined as a planned and deliberate process to bring about improvement. In a school context, innovation involves altering teachers' attitudes and practices and is usually associated with the general concept of change (White, 1987).

In this study, I consider the teachers' collaborative inquiry and the various techniques they implemented to improve their practices as an innovation initiated by the teachers. This kind of change is usually referred to as an ideal goal to be achieved which promotes ownership and allows teachers to act as internal change agents (Stenhouse 1975; Rudduck 1991).

The teacher-researchers in this study, in their efforts to implement their innovation, were exploring a number of strategies, which according to them might result in improving their instruction. In the first meetings during the period between October-November 1996, the teachers had decided to change the way they taught writing to their students and decided to adopt strategies, which would encourage students to write more frequently. In their first meeting, they explored the various techniques, which would result in developing fluency in writing such as journal and diary writing, and letter writing. Most of the group favored the letter writing technique because they felt that it would enable students to develop their relationship with the teacher as well as communicate in a non-threatening or judgmental manner. Therefore, teachers started introducing the idea to their students in their writing courses and many students became enthusiastic and started communicating in writing with
their teachers. In their subsequent meetings, teachers started discussing the possibility of
maximizing student involvement in the project, and Shaima came up with the idea of the
whole school writing activity, out of a concern that some students who were in other
teachers' classes might be deprived of the experience of trying to write differently.

After discussing and considering some management and financial issues (i.e., the money
to buy a large glass mail box, real writing pads for replies, etc) they decided to keep a large
glass box in front of the teachers' room where students would drop their letters to the teachers
and teachers would respond to the letters. Initially, the goal was to encourage the majority of
students to write expressively. After a month of experimenting with the whole school writing
project, teachers realized the difficulty of managing their responses to students. In their
second group meeting in early November, their discussion focused on this issue and they
expressed this concern:

**Hanadi:**
The main purpose of encouraging students to write letters is to improve their
writing. Now how about their mistakes? Do you correct each letter and give it
back? Because for me I don't like the idea of correcting the letters and giving
it back to students. They feel discouraged and won't write again.

**Nasreen:**
That's true. But then how do we improve their writing?

**Hanadi:**
I was thinking of something else, of course you need to respond to students
but I was thinking of talking to each student individually. I don't know ...may
be discussing the mistakes they make in their letters (some kind of
conferencing).

**Nasreen:**
Ok. But don't mark them yet.

**Hanadi:**
No, I won't mark them. I will focus only on the serious errors.
Shaima:
Of course those major ones. I was thinking about what Hanadi said in terms of correction. I have been thinking I wouldn’t like to correct their letters because when I introduced the idea of letter writing, it was something very personal. But I’m thinking now to go back to their general mistakes. Perhaps I will choose only three most common errors and I might give them some kind of remedial lesson.

Shaima:
It’s always useful to negotiate with students. There’s something I am thinking of doing and that is I want to discuss this with my students. I will first thank them for their letters and then I will point out that there are a few things that we need to work at. I wouldn’t mark their letters and I will negotiate with them. I want to know if they want me to go back to the important points in the letter and we do some work with it. For example, do some extra practice and perhaps at another stage when the letter is written I think of giving the letters back and ask them to correct for themselves. Do you think this would be discouraging?

Hanadi:
I am against correcting the mistakes on the letter itself, but at least we should draw their attention to their mistakes. (GM#3, Nov. 1996).

Nasreen was in a similar situation and had concerns about managing her responses to the students who wrote to her. She had about 90 students and most of them had written back to her. She says, “I’ve come to notice that students are waiting for their replies and those who get their replies have written back to me. They even asked me, “teacher, even if you are not teaching us next years, can we still write to you?” (GM #3, Nov. 1996).

Managing their response to a large number of students was becoming a problem to the teachers, although they were still exploring alternatives around the problem. And Nasreen in her search for other possibilities adds:

I am thinking to put my responses on P.C. I’ll personalize my responses to each student. I mean I will write dear Sameera...blank and at the end of course add one sentence at least. I could even in the same class change a bit of paragraphs. I don’t know....still I’m not too happy about it. (GM #3, Nov. 1996).
Shaima, aware of their original goal of introducing the letter writing technique, although she had the same management problem with her students, felt that:

It is a good idea because that way it is easier to respond to a large number of students, but at the same time it gets the personal touch out of it. I think what students need is our personal touch. (GM #3, Nov. 1996).

The process of discussing their concerns about students’ involvement, and the nature of their responses to student writers clearly illustrates the power of dialogue and feedback and how it enables teachers to explore possibilities and alternatives. In the teacher research literature, it has been argued that teacher researchers learn a lot from the dialogue and feedback generated in group discussions. It is further argued that the feedback that teachers provide each other while investigating their practice plays an important role in their personal development (Bill & Gilbert, 1996). Responses to disclosure of concerns, worries and uncertainties help the teacher researchers to cope with the process of undergoing change. The kind of feedback that teachers in the group provided each other was significant in a number of ways. First, it enabled them to share issues that they normally dealt with individually. These issues included instructional priorities, decision-making and pedagogical concerns.

In the case of the Bahraini teacher-researcher group, feedback also enabled the individual teachers to focus on their teaching priorities, which in this case was helping students write better and explore strategies to cope with problems associated with exploring alternatives. Shaima, for instance, raises an important issue in dealing with their teaching innovation. In their eagerness to help most of their students, the teacher researchers were unaware of (or had not yet considered) how to deal with the students’ written work in terms of error correction, the nature and the frequency of their responses to pupils, and issues related to the assessments
of students’ writing at the end of the course. Yet all of these concerns emerged in the group’s conversations as they discussed the implementation of the strategies they had proposed. This is further illustrated in the following excerpts from teachers’ group meeting in November:

Hanadi:
The main purpose of encouraging students to write is to improve their writing. Now, is it necessary to correct every letter we get?

Shaima:
In the beginning, I thought I wouldn’t like to correct their letters because when I first introduced the idea, it was something very personal. But now I am thinking to go back to their general mistakes. I will choose only three, the most common mistakes, which are hindering communication and I might give them some sort of remedial work. I guess may be that’s what Hanadi is thinking about.

Nasreen:
But we eventually need to prepare students for exams. What is the end product? What if they were asked to write on something that they haven’t practiced in our writing lessons?

Shaima:
OK. We need to clarify something here; I mean something that I don’t know much about at this stage. What are our main objectives? Are we trying to concentrate on developing students’ fluency in writing or accuracy? Because all of this discussion goes back to what we chose to be our objectives at the beginning of this project, right? (GM #4, Nov. 1996).

As the above quotes reflect, feedback also plays a significant role in helping teachers cope with uncertainties in implementing innovation. Once the group was successfully implementing the letter writing technique as a method of encouraging students to write effectively in English, they now had to face the concern about other dimensions of the enterprise, that is the students’ assessment, exams etc. Mayer (1997: 117) writes,

... the awareness of limits must not hinder action, but require the ability to act in uncertainty, to full risk and unpredictability. Uncertainty allows us to be flexible and to listen and appreciate other people’s opinions, to abandon known paths and seek new ones.
The process of deliberation among teacher-researchers concerning the nature of their responses to students' writing also illustrates a third aspect of feedback, that is enabling teachers to explore alternatives and further changes in their practice. As responding to students became a major concern for teacher-researchers, they began exploring other possibilities and means of managing their written interaction with student writers. For instance, Hanadi introduced another strategy which Shaima seemed to like:

**Hanadi:**
I asked my students to keep a diary, they write anything they want everyday, just a short paragraph, whatever they want. And we try to listen to some of them in class each day but I don't correct them. I mean the idea of having a diary is something personal. The main objective is to encourage students to write freely.

**Shaima:**
I like this idea (to Hanadi). I think I'll try your idea of keeping a diary, if you don't mind. (GM #3, Nov. 1996).

For Shaima, the kind of feedback she provides is confirmation and permission to use the techniques employed by her other colleagues and she felt it represents an alternative that is worth exploring. For Hanadi, Shaima's comments provided a positive feedback of her idea. Her idea is validated, in essence, by the fact that Shaima is interested in implementing it in her own class. Nasreen, on the other hand, introduces a different technique, a modification to Hanadi's idea. She discusses with the group the idea of taking students on field trips and after the visits they write about their experience. She explains,

I'll prepare them and make sure they know what to focus on. After the visit, they can write about their experiences in their diary, for example write about how they felt...etc. I wouldn't ask them to write something descriptive, such as describing the place or the people. I would like it to be authentic. So, perhaps I will adopt Hanadi's diary writing technique and encourage my students to write. (GM #3, Nov. 96)

The teachers' conversations in the beginning of the project centered around negotiating
what works best in their classrooms. In their group discussions, as I reflect back now, their conversations focused on exploring different strategies and assessing them in terms of how authentic theses tasks were to student writers. For the teacher-researchers in this case, the element of feedback was becoming crucial. Bell and Gilbert (1996) view feedback as an important aspect of fostering teachers’ personal development and growth. When teachers disclose their concerns, worries and share their strategies in introducing and handling the change process, the teachers' personal development is enhanced as they gain competence, increased self-esteem and emotional support from each other. In the case of Bahraini teachers the kind of peer feedback that teacher-researchers provided each other was significant in helping them cope with the innovation and develop competence with their ability to deal with the change process.

II. Developing awareness and tolerance toward different perspectives

In their group discussion, I realized that the most experienced teachers (in this case Nasreen and Shaima) were contributing more to the discussions and were more critical of how their new ideas were implemented. Whenever they discussed a certain technique, they would provide encouraging and supportive arguments. In many cases they explored alternatives and raised a number of concerns. For instance, they wondered if they should implement letter-writing technique in their own class or introduce the whole school to the writing project. They reflected on their priorities and how do they deal with concerns about students’ achievement at the end of the semester. Are they encouraging accuracy or fluency in writing classrooms? (Author’s personal field notes).

These types of issues usually generated interesting discussions about their collaborative
inquiry. After several months of implementing their letter-writing technique, the teachers became concerned about how to construct their feedback to student writers. Their major concern was developing in students a positive attitude towards writing in English and expressing their thoughts, as well as learning through the writing process. At the same time, as language teachers, they were aware that they had to make sure that certain errors should be attended to, so that students also develop awareness in terms of their language errors, and work towards self-improvement in order to succeed on the end of semester school examinations. The following excerpts demonstrate how teacher-researchers struggled with these concerns:

**Hanadi:**
When you reply to them, you should also show them their mistakes.

**Nasreen:**
No, no. This is highly demotivating. You see, the students write to us because they feel free, and they're not worried about making mistakes. They are trying to communicate.

**Hanadi:**
I am against correcting errors in letters themselves. But I feel I should at least find a way to deal with students' mistakes in general, not every word or every sentence, but the common errors.

**Shaima:**
This is what I did. I looked at their letters and then I noticed that they have problems with sentences. So I gave extra material for the whole class without really mentioning what I noticed in their letters. (GM #8, March 97)

The above discussions are significant in that teachers were becoming more tolerant of each other's perspectives as well as developing sensitivity towards students' needs. In the case of Bahrain EFL teachers, this kind of practice is unusual. Teachers rarely get the
opportunity to get together and examine their practice in detail. Yet, these teacher researchers demonstrate that through their on-going reflections on their teaching practice, they have become better able to listen to each other, accept and explore alternatives. Their discussions also reveal that, despite the fact that each teacher researcher had a different perception of how to deal with problems associated with doing things differently, they were tolerant and willing to listen to each other and scrutinize their strategies in order to help each other improve their writing approach. This process is significant in fostering teachers' professional development as they become increasingly articulate in describing their practice, develop more flexible ways of reasoning, interpreting and understanding better the realities of altering one's practice.

III. Employing strategies to cope with innovation

When the group decided to explore their practice by doing research, they were highly motivated and interested in experiencing a very different kind of professional development activity. In the first stage, when I was in Bahrain and joined the group as a participant observer, I felt that establishing a supportive school environment was necessary to help the teacher-researchers gain the support they required for doing research. In this case, support mainly involved some release time for doing research. I felt the first important step towards achieving this was approaching the school principal and gaining her support for what teachers were involved in. I had a number of informal meetings and discussions with the school principal during which I explained the research project as an approach to enhance teachers' professional development. The principal seemed supportive and enthusiastic about this new practice in her school and wanted to learn more about this experience. She requested a
workshop for the school administrative council in order to explain to them what the group was doing and make them aware as well as gain their support. After several discussions, we decided to conduct a workshop and set a date for that. Shaima, one of the teachers from the research group volunteered to run the workshop with me and we felt that her presence and input would hopefully motivate the rest of the school staff. Therefore, we conducted the workshop on November 20th, 1996 in which the principal and the school administrative members all participated. In this one-hour workshop, Shaima and I attempted to tackle the following issues:

1. What professional development means.

2. The different forms of professional development activities and how they are usually conducted.

3. Factors that affect the school-based professional development activities.

The workshop session to me was quite informative because from our discussion, I learned a great deal about the teachers, how they viewed their learning and what they considered as obstacles to their professional development within the school. I learned that they all believed that they are responsible for their own learning, which should result from continuous efforts. In this respect, it confirmed the fact that many schoolteachers are eager to cooperate and learn from each other (Acker, 1999). Yet, the school structure might act as an obstacle to this kind of practice. In the next chapter, I will revisit this issue and will discuss it in greater detail. Meanwhile I refer to this experience to illustrate our effort to gain support from colleagues, the principal and other decision makers in school in order to help teachers sustain their research project. The outcome of this workshop was a promise from the principal to give
teacher-researchers a half-day release time once a month, as an opportunity for teachers to get together and discuss and engage with each other about their research. Another gain was the senior teacher's support, who as part of her responsibility was required to conduct meetings of about 50 minutes with her staff to inform them of administrative matters or sometimes attend to pedagogical issues. The senior teacher, who is one of the teacher-researchers herself, decided to arrange her staff meetings in a way so that one of the meetings would be devoted for the group discussions where they met twice a month and devote the other two weeks to her administrative concerns. Unfortunately the principal's decision to provide the group with the release time was never acted upon, a situation, which resulted in a lot of discomfort and feelings of being unappreciated among teacher-researchers. However, the senior teacher's commitment to support the group was important and a form of positive feedback to the group and was considered an important factor in helping teachers sustain their research. Here, as I reflect back on our meetings, I recall how motivated and committed the teacher-researchers were, despite the fact that they were mostly busy with their teaching loads and rarely had enough time for socializing with their other colleagues. It should be pointed out here that Bahraini teacher-researchers, as is the case with many other practitioners conducting research on their practice, rarely get the recognition and support necessary to facilitate the process. Similar experiences elsewhere have been reported where school management does not share with the teachers their priorities or they conceptualize teacher learning differently. But yet, the teacher-researchers were determined to continue with their research and felt that they were undergoing a unique experience of learning from each other and examining their practice in a non-threatening environment. They, as will be discussed in the coming section, felt that the research project was providing an opportunity for
empowerment and improved pedagogical judgment. As a participant observer in their group meetings in the first term, I felt that each individual teacher was able to critically examine not only the pedagogical issues but also issues related to the politics of schooling and decision making factors. As they struggled for support and recognition, they developed the ability to critically examine issues beyond their daily classroom concerns. The act of reflecting on their practice systematically, and the support and feedback they provided each other enabled the teacher researchers to think critically about the structural issues in relation to their own teaching and research.

Many educators in the field of teacher education write that teacher empowerment is achieved when teachers critically inquire into their values, ideologies and theoretical commitment to innovation and change. When teacher-researchers were implementing their techniques to improve their practice, and were meeting only bi-weekly, they discovered that they needed more than one period to meet and discuss. They felt the need for more support from the school and when they did not get any form of significant support, the nature of their group discussions changed. Looking at the transcriptions of the group meetings conducted at the end of first term and most of the second term, there seems to be a shift from discussing issues related to the pedagogical aspect of their innovation towards the more critical elements of doing research and analyzing the structural demands placed upon teacher-researchers. In the section below, I will discuss two aspects related to the challenge of doing research in a school culture where such a practice is not the norm and where conventional practices are sometimes contradictory to what teachers view or plan for their own learning and self development.
IV. Developing awareness of their own context: Examining the culture of school

It is widely established that school cultures are not easy to identify and describe. Many studies have looked at the culture of schools (Nias 1989; Fullan 1991; Acker 1999). Pollard and Trigg (1997) point out that within larger schools, (such as secondary schools) despite the school’s attempt to achieve coherence through school development planning, differences in staff perspectives arise and some conflict will naturally exist. In fact, some distinct subcultures may exist in certain departments, which may be more or less congruent with the dominant school ethos. Staff brings to the school their own perspectives, opinions and skills or enthusiasm. These perceptions are normally used to construct an understanding about the way the school is.

In Bahraini schools, the school principal has a significant degree of power to initiate and influence the development of a school culture. Other school members, such as senior teachers or assistant principals may also influence events in school, depending upon their degree of status, power and authority. Some researchers believe that collaborative work would effect the school culture and the education quality of the school (Mortimer, et. al. 1988). Moreover, Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) suggest that effective leadership is the type, which makes activities meaningful for others, rather than being, the charismatic innovative high flyer that moves whole school culture forward. Many have advocated that in order for change to be actively managed, those involved in the process must feel empowered and own the process. According to Fullan and Hargreaves (1992), empowerment comes with individuals taking control rather than being controlled. Dynamic school cultures, they argue, are created not by elaborate and inflexible systems but by frameworks, which allow the development of a
culture of collaboration where individuals can learn from each other and from the social and professional environment in which they exist. Recent work in the field of school effectiveness identifies the importance of schools developing cultures in which teachers are supported in taking risks, changing their practices and growing (Hopkins, 1934; Nixon et. al, 1996).

The literature cited above suggests the significance of providing a supportive learning environment for teacher-researchers in order to sustain their research process and work towards effective change. Reflecting on the experience of Bahraini teacher-researchers, and their conversations towards the middle of the research process clearly demonstrates their tension not only from the lack of meaningful support but also from various school demands placed upon the teachers. This tension becomes evident in the group’s meeting in the second semester, which is discussed below.

In their sixth group meeting in January 1997, the group was now discussing their plans for the next term and revisiting their priorities. As they were discussing and planning the frequency of their meetings in term two, the senior teacher drew the group’s attention to some of the school’s activities, which had been planned by the principal. The teachers of all subjects were expected to participate in the organization and conduct of these activities which included the following:

1. A charity bazaar, which is a fund raising event organized by school and mainly depends on the teacher’s effort to find sponsors for this event in addition to their own school to make products to sell to the public.

2. The English week, during which English teachers are required to encourage, train, and prepare their students to take part in activities such as sketches, short plays, buying and selling things, etc.
Shaima:
According to the school plan for Term II, we’ll be busier than the first term. The school has planned many activities, we’ll have a charity Bazaar and when we have this kind of activity taking place, it’s not only that one-week. I mean during that week, teachers have to go out of the school quite frequently to collect donations and organize the event. From past experience when we have such activities, it’s a couple of months of continuous work and preparation. Another thing is that the principal has always had high expectations from the English staff. Also, we’ve been asked to have two weeks of department activities, she calls it “English Day” but now it’s gone up to two weeks.

Minas:
This certainly takes a lot of your teaching time. Don’t you have a say in all this?

Shaima:
Not much. All I know is that we’re expected to carry out all these activities by the end of the term. But we’re not ready because we don’t have time. Obviously, what we lack here is the question of our priorities. I’ve been trying to get this clear to the principal. I keep asking what is our main objective? I mean what happens when we do all these activities? Is it just to entertain students? Wouldn’t it be more useful to do something to raise the students’ standard? This is what I feel. (GM #6, Jan, 97)

The issue at hand, according to Shaima at least, is not only the amount of the work expected from the ESL staff. Rather, it is the nature of these activities and their usefulness in terms of teaching and learning. The group, at this point, started thinking about how to cope with all these demands. In addition to their commitments towards their own teaching and research, they had concerns about not being able to meet on a regular basis as they had done in the first semester. Despite their decision to continue implementing their teaching techniques, they realized that their group meetings formed essential part of doing research. They considered their dialogues, the feedback they provided each other, the act of listening to
each other's problems and exploring alternatives all to be an important part of their learning.

I believe this type of discussion and reflective comments at this stage are significant because, not only do they illustrate the tension associated with implementing innovation but they reveal the power of collective inquiry in developing teachers' critical abilities to reflect upon and discuss the institutional and societal forces that constrain their freedom of action and limit the efficacy of their actions. I became interested to know what would happen if teachers decided not to be part of these activities. So I asked the teachers whether as a group they could challenge this top-down decision making approach and imposed priorities. Shaima explains:

We can't go against their decision because if we do, then we'll have to face the consequences, which will be that everybody else in school is active but not the English department. Now, as the head of the department I may go back to them and ask not to take part. The thing is, I believe what students gain is very limited from these activities. You see the same time and energy could be utilized for more successful activities like our research for instance. (GM #6, Jan.97)

Shaima further elaborates on the possible consequences of their action, that is the decision not to get involved in school activities or its major events:

If you challenge the principal and decided not to participate, then you've got to be ready for the consequences. The reports at the end of the school year is one example which shows you were not active and didn't cooperate with the rest of the school members. So, you see a label is easily attached to you simply because you decided to do more important things for your teaching practice. (GM #6, Jan.97)

Nasreen, however, feels that they cannot simply reject the school’s agenda and is very aware of the consequences. She proposes an alternative way of dealing with this dilemma:

To be on the safe side, perhaps we need to compromise on this. We don't want to get into clashes with the school administration. We know that the principal attaches a lot of significance to these school activities. (GM #6, Jan.97)

Shaima on the other hand explains that:
I am not against school activities but we also need to do something, which maximizes learning opportunities for our students. We can do a few things for the school but they shouldn't take a lot of our time. Time is what we are fighting for. You see, what we basically need to do is that we should make a decision to practice our right. You know we should also help the school in such a way not to have too many objectives; the school year is too short. (GM #6, Jan.97)

Upon reflection on the teachers' conversations and comments, one of the insights that is gained is that important contributory factors lie outside the teacher sphere of influence. As the evidence indicates, the teacher researchers in this study have developed different attitudes towards the problems. It seems that the research project has allowed teachers to interrogate the context of their work. Clearly, the school structure reflects certain assumptions about the teachers' work. The priority is seen to be given to those activities, which make the school visible in a larger community. During the time where teachers were conducting their research, the school had planned other activities in which most teachers were expected to take part. Since teachers did not have any input into the process of planning, and in many cases they rarely have the opportunity to be included in major decisions with regards to the school's agenda, time devoted to their research was put under additional pressure. That is, the lack of genuine support from the school community or the understanding in the form of granting the researching teachers the freedom to continue with their project without necessarily being penalized for their inability to participate in all events.

Examining the teachers' dialogues, which extended along the complete academic year, one can clearly notice numerous instances of their eagerness to develop their practice and positive attitudes in employing innovation. Yet, as reported elsewhere, unfortunately, the school environment does not seem to provide enough support for a reflective stance leading to professional change and improvement (Russell, 1993). It is argued that reflection serves
little purpose if it does not involve in significant ways change to teaching as well as
development of thinking about the context in which teaching is conducted. Teacher-
researchers in this study, not only discussed and reflected upon changing their own
perspective and actions, but a large portion of their discussions focused upon analyzing issues
above their level of control, that is the existing power structure of the institution in which
their research was taking place. Many of the comments they made illustrate an awareness and
the structural constraints of the context in which they work. Shaima for instance reflects:

Each organization has certain objectives, which are known to the teachers, whether
they’re obvious or hidden and as a teacher, you are pushed towards achieving them.
So, teachers for instance work to satisfy the principal and people in authority (in this
case ministry of education personnels) and they get financial reward for that. I tried
to change some of these objectives but there was no use. I tried to explain to the
principal that we have too many activities going on in the school at the same time and
our teaching is interrupted. We are unable to concentrate with our self-development
plans. We were too busy doing things for charity bazaars and what was the outcome?
How much could students benefit from all these? I shared with the school principal
our tension and lack of moral support. We needed time to sit and think and focus. I
raised all these in an official meeting (in the school-council meeting) but
unfortunately none of the members supported me. So I feel the whole point was lost.
(TI #2, Oct. 97)

What this indicates is the fact that the school with its own previously determined
objectives does not always provide a supportive environment to cater to teachers’ self
directed professional development activity. The interest seems to be in matters such as school
appraisal and promotion system, which were one of the issues that teacher-researchers in this
study questioned and raised in the conversation I had with them a year later. They questioned
the school’s priorities. For instance Mona observes:

Here, many principals are occupied with show-off activities. They compete in
organizing exhibitions and not too many of them are concerned with the
development of the schoolteachers. These kinds of activities have become part of
the school culture. I wish we could simply abandon this kind of activities and
instead concentrate on learning, and the learning difficulties or ways to improve the quality of learning. Now, the main emphasis is upon just teaching. What we’d like to see is a shift towards learning and how teachers can help students to learn better and at the same time they learn from each other. (TI#2, Sept. 97).

What Mona is reflecting here is not only the school’s effort to gain some kind of recognition from authorities in the educational system, but also to the fact that this has created some sort of awareness among teachers to work towards gaining the principal’s recognition for promotion opportunities and incentives. Along the same line, Nasreen adds:

There are teachers who don’t have the time to actually teach because they are busy doing activities outside the school for publicity. There are also teachers who are too busy with fund raising activities that they do not have the time to focus upon students learning, let alone their own learning. (TI #2, Sept. 97).

The question is, however, to what extent are the teachers prepared to challenge these established norms. Shaima reacts:

As a senior teacher, even when I decide not to participate in some school activities, teachers in my own department will go against the idea. They don’t want to be seen as odd ones or fear of being labeled as uncooperative. (TI #2, Oct. 97).

While cooperation is a desirable characteristic, the way it is being defined and used in this context is different from our normal understanding of the term. The difference is between “being cooperative or not being cooperative” and setting priorities. Clearly, teacher researchers, although eager to learn for the purpose of improving and altering their practice, are very much aware of the consequences of their action as it affects their other activities or obligations in the school. They are aware that at the end of the school year, they will be judged in their reports and consequently, their future promotions will be affected if their school assessment seems unsatisfactory or they have been considered less cooperative by the school administration. Under these circumstances, what most teachers opt for is not to
challenge the school status quo but rather to create their own strategies of coping with the demands of teaching. Contrary to the arguments that teachers are socially isolated in their schools by choice (Lortie, 1975), “isolation in some circumstances is created by institutional expectations and practices.” It is evident that teachers nowadays are undergoing change with respect to how teaching is conducted and how their own learning should take place. They are caring individuals who are eager to learn in a collaborative environment (Acker, 1999). Yet, this new vision of teachers as learners and the perspective that professional development is the responsibility of the practicing teachers has not been fully conceptualized by the institutional leaders. In the case of Bahraini teacher researchers, even when their effort is recognized by the school administration, when it comes to requesting the support required for a sustained process, the institutional practices might act as an obstacle and may restrict the teachers’ freedom to continue with their initiated plan for self development.

In this chapter, the story of four EFL teachers doing research on their practices was portrayed. Based upon the emerging themes from the data gathered, I argued that teachers doing research is an innovative and a challenging experience which positively contributed to the teachers’ professional development. The act of the collaborative inquiry created the opportunity for teachers to get together on a regular basis and critically examine issues which are not normally discussed in their situation, which is characterized by top-down decision making processes. Being in an inquiry group provided the condition for teachers to reflect on their practical concerns and voice their problems as they constructed their understanding of what it means to be engaged in the process of collaborative learning. Their story continues in the next chapter in which I will explore how the participants constructed their own meaning of learning in the context of professional development and how they perceived the impact of
CHAPTER 7

TEACHER AND STUDENT LEARNING: EXPLORING PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVES.

"The end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started. And know the place for the first time" T.S. Elliot

Introduction

This chapter presents the participants’ perspective of their own learning and addresses the issue of teacher learning in the context of examining practice. In addition, it addresses the impact of teachers’ self-initiated inquiry upon the student’s learning from the researching teachers’ perspective. I will start this chapter by establishing a definition of learning and then draw upon the available data to validate teacher learning in the context of professional development activity. The teacher’s reflection on their practice and their systematic conversations during their regular meetings facilitated teachers’ learning. The different areas of learning that I would like to examine are the following:

1) Developing knowledge about practice that facilitated teachers’ personal development.
2) Learning about research techniques and the process of initiating action research.
3) Learning about the impact of their research on students and the extent to which teacher research contributed to developing/improving learning for their students.

I. Development of knowledge about practice and personal development

This section examines the participants’ view of the extent to which systematic inquiry
enhanced their learning and improved their teaching practices. It is vital to first establish a
definition of learning in this context and then, relating it to the current case, examine the
nature of teacher learning which resulted from conducting research in the context of a
professional development activity.

In a broad sense, learning is seen as the creation of knowledge through the transformation
of experience (Moon, 1999). This view reflects a more active concept of learning than merely
acquiring certain skills. To understand the nature of learning evidenced in this study, I have
relied on the theory of experiential learning as discussed by Kolb (1984). Experiential
learning refers to the organization and construction of knowledge from observations that have
been made in some practical contexts, with the implication that the learning can lead to an
improved action. Moreover, according to this view, reflection plays a key role in enhancing
experiential learning. Implicit to the notion of most experiential learning theory is also
perpetuation, that is, learning leads to the action or rather improved actions. This is expressed
in Kolb’s cycle of experiential learning in which reflective observation is the process of
bringing the ‘concrete experiencing’ of events to the state of ‘abstract conceptualization’.
Abstract concepts, thus formed, guide a further ‘active experimentation’ and hence, more
concrete experiencing.

As their conversations continued throughout their investigation of practice, the
participants began to consider the importance of assessing their own learning and of the
impact of their learning and innovation on their students. During March-May 1997, in
addition to their regular discussions, which focused on the implementation of the writing
techniques, they were now focusing upon their own learning and the extent to which their
learning was enhanced through the small social community.
One of the positive aspects of systematic inquiry and reflective conversations in a collaborative context, as illustrated in this study, is the development of teacher’s knowledge about their own practice and the development of their personal knowledge about teaching. Personal development is seen as an important component of professional development. Eraut (1994) followed by Winter (1995) and Bell and Gilbert (1996) point out that professional development is dependent upon the development of individual’s self awareness. In his reference to personal development, Eraut (1994) uses the term ‘personal knowledge’ to describe the personal meanings that an individual constructs as a result of experiences. He uses the term self-knowledge to include ‘self awareness’ about one’s knowledge and skills in order to achieve professional growth. Self-awareness is therefore seen to form an important basis for the understanding of both professional and personal development (Eraut, 1994).

Responding to my question whether or not the project provided learning opportunities for the participants, and in what ways if so, Shaima made the following comment:

What I like about this research project is that, for me it’s a good experience because whenever I used to think about teacher’s development in my school, I used to refer to literature or theories to read about. Now, we are experimenting and doing. I feel I’ve built more trust in this approach. We always meet and discuss and think about the idea and evaluate it relying on our experience. This is a great learning for me. (GM# 9, April 1997)

As this excerpt illustrates, for Shaima, learning is no longer seen as something merely shared by someone else or through literature. In this project, learning for Shaima entails experimenting, discussing ideas and evaluating ideas based on experience. In other words, the research project provided an opportunity to construct personal knowledge about her teaching practice. More importantly, her notion of professional development seems to have changed as a result of engaging in this project. This experience provided Shaima (and the rest of the
group) with an opportunity to discuss, explore, implement and evaluate ideas about teaching. These entailed significant research skills and procedures, which were obviously considered useful learning and professional development activities by the participants.

Nasreen shares a similar view about her learning:

I've learned a lot too. I used to worry a lot about covering the syllabus. Teaching meant that I cover every thing in the curriculum. But now I say to the hell with this portion. I can do something else. (GM# 9, April 1997)

Nasreen’s interpretation of what it means to be a teacher is interesting. To her, she now has learned that being a teacher is not simply a matter of delivering a syllabus or transmitting what might be called information or knowledge. Her understanding of teaching has changed to include making decisions on what to teach, how to pace her teaching and how to respond to students’ needs. This is particularly significant considering the fact that these teachers are required by the ministry to cover mandated curricula. Collaborative inquiry and reflection has empowered Nasreen and enabled her to develop the capacity to take actions on her own. For many teachers, syllabus completion is considered the main objective for their teaching. Even for those who opt for innovation or experimentation of different ideas, the issue of covering the syllabus is seen as a major priority or obstacle depending on one’s perspective. Nasreen, on the other hand, has developed awareness that in order to implement innovation and transform practice, you need to have the power to make certain choices. For Nasreen, this sort of development has occurred as a result of exploring and discussing different ideas to improve her teaching practice and student learning.

In our second interview, I asked Shaima about what aspect of change she considered significant in their research. In her response she explained:

What we went through was really a good experience especially for me. It was a
learning experience. Personally I got to know my staff better and developed more trusts in them. Previously, I used to think in order to develop the staff, I have to run workshops. It was like something that had to start with me and then I designed different workshops and teach them. Then follow up to see their application and so on. Now after this research experience, although it was a short one, to me and despite some obstacles from the school, I feel I now think differently. Now, I look at the issue of teacher change differently. I really do not need to tell the teachers how to do things but rather it is to go to the teachers and start from them. Actually for me this research has a beginning of change, not only attitude but also in the way of thinking. (TI# 2-Oct. 1997)

For Shaima, the experience has resulted in learning and change in aspects beyond the classroom. Shaima has also learned how to modify her role to become an effective senior teacher. She has reached an understanding that relying mainly on theories about teaching do not always facilitate appropriate learning. It has become clear to her that teachers’ professional knowledge forms an important source of solution to problems of classroom practice. What Shaima and Nasreen have both expressed clearly reveal a development of self-awareness, an intentional development towards improvement as well as change in their understanding of their own learning process. It has been argued that the pattern of examining and modifying one’s existing beliefs and habits leads to the most effective learning (Head & Tyler, 1997). Furthermore, the literature of teacher education suggests that relying mainly on theories of teaching and learning doesn’t solve problems of practice. Curriculum development and teaching, as Eisner (2000) writes are practical activities.

The aim is not to produce primarily new knowledge but to get something done. And to be able to do this, an individual requires an extra ordinary sensitivity to context that is predicated on the individual’s ability to weigh alternative courses of action, to deal with inevitable trade-offs and the expectations that each situation will be significantly unique (p.354).

What is significant in the evidence gathered from the teacher’s conversations is the realization that they are increasingly learning from each other, not only more about practice
but also about the change in their attitudes towards their own learning and thinking about their practice.

Shaima has learned that professional development is not something done to the teachers. Rather, learning is far more valuable when teachers are given the opportunity to set the agenda and lead the direction of their professional development. She further elaborates on the significance of changing the teacher’s attitudes in order to provide context for a worthwhile change. Shaima maintains:

I like to emphasize the importance of attitude. I think that you can’t expect teachers to change unless you change their attitudes. This research slightly contributed in changing attitudes but more importantly it changed my attitude. I now feel more sensitive to the teacher’s problems than before, and this makes my management even easier. I’ve decided to be a good manager. First you have to understand their problems and concerns and be sympathetic. I want to follow the same strategy of researching our work. (TI # 2- October, 1997)

Hanadi, another participant who was later promoted to the position of a senior teacher of English in another school, shares with Shaima a similar understanding. To her, because of the learning that was facilitated in doing research collaboratively, this kind of practice had become an approach that she would advocate for teacher development, she explained:

Investigating our own practice enabled me to learn a great deal about teaching and other teachers and my own students. As a senior teacher I would definitely try to foster this kind of learning environment in my new school. (TI# 2- Sept.1997)

The above data reveal the fact that, to the research group, teachers’ knowledge is central to the inquiry process. The section that follows demonstrates how teacher researchers critically examine and explore this knowledge in order for it to be shared with others. This reflects a broadening perspective as teachers question their assumptions about themselves and their students and develop new perspective towards teaching and learning. This broadening of
perspectives is significant because it brings about change in the professional identities of teachers as they learn to articulate more clearly their ideas about their own learning and development as well as their students.

II. Teacher learning: Developing their researching skills

Towards the end of the school year, during April 1997, teacher researchers were now beginning to become concerned about the impact of their research on their students' learning. They felt that they were observing some improvement in their students' writing, however, they needed to get students' feedback on the effectiveness of the strategies they had employed. They had become aware of the need for student inclusion on the basis of their belief that their future plans for improving their teaching required feedback from students. This kind of thinking is significant because it is not a common practice among teachers in Bahrain. Students are seldom approached to voice the directions which their learning should take unless someone is doing research as part of a program requirement. In their group meeting, after which they decided that the students' input into the approach was crucial, the teacher researchers were now negotiating the best possible technique to gather data on this aspect. In essence, an action research format was taking place during which teachers were now reflecting, negotiating and planning what to do best to get the students' feedback. The teacher researchers had realized that through the introduction of real life techniques, which aimed at developing students' fluency in writing, students were actually writing more and were better able to express their ideas. Their major concern was, however, whether such improvement in students' written abilities could be attributed to the strategies teachers had implemented in their lessons. The following discussions reveal the type of learning that was
taking place among the participants, that is, developing their research skills:

Shaima: I think the questionnaire might not give an accurate data because those students who wrote less often than the others might not be able to give feedback accurately. But if we gather those students who wrote more frequently in a group to discuss and get their feedback on how letter writing as a real-life activity really helped them and how we can improve it in future. Also, in an open discussion we can get more spontaneous responses. (GM # 10, May. 1997)

Yet her other colleagues raised the question of practicality and efficiency in gathering all those students from various classes, and especially taking into account the fact that by now many students will have stopped coming to school as it was towards the end of the term, and they usually stay home preparing for the final examination. Then, the group decided to design a questionnaire to be given to students. Again, the content and format of the questionnaire lead to some interesting discussions and negotiation between the participants concerning what to include in the questionnaire and in what format in order to allow for genuine feedback on the part of the students. So, they all opted for questions that are open-ended so that students get the opportunity to express their ideas freely. Following that, a questionnaire was developed which focused upon the following aspects:

1. The frequency with which students were able to write.
2. Whether or not the techniques introduced by their writing teachers were useful.
3. How these techniques helped them improve their writing skills.
4. Students' suggestions concerning how the techniques used by their teachers could be enhanced and made more effective.

The teachers' discussions and their decision to include students as part of gathering data for research on their practice is significant. Looking at the questions above, they demonstrate how teachers valued the students' input and reflect their intention to learn from students.
Moreover, it reflects how teachers' own learning facilitated openness and the ability to examine other perspectives related not only to their own context as it was discussed in the previous chapter, but more importantly how such learning enhanced the learning situation for their students. The teachers' concern was although they had gained knowledge about their students' ability through classroom observations and students' work, including students' perspective was an integral part of their research about student improvement. They wanted to share the knowledge generated from the research experience and make it public to colleagues in the field of EFL teaching. Therefore, the realization that their claim should be supported by evidence and data seemed to necessitate the action they took towards students' inclusion.

Traditional form of schooling tends to adopt the 'blank slate' approach to learning which assumes that the teacher will tell the students what they need to know, and the students will not question the teachers expertise. The teacher-researchers in this group, however, had a different assumption about their students' learning. They saw learners as responsible individuals who are capable of identifying their needs rather than merely relying on their teachers as a source of information and help in the adventure of learning. These teachers realized they were not in a position to mandate learning activities or control the learning process through their formal authority as in the past. Instead, they decided to negotiate learning activities with their students. The teacher researchers, therefore, are of the type, which Gibran (a Lebanese poet) has beautifully portrayed in his poem “The prophet”:

Then said a teacher, speak to us of teaching.
And he said:
No man can reveal to you aught but that which already lies half asleep in the dawning of your knowledge.
The teacher who walks in the shadow of the temple, among his followers, gives not of his wisdom but rather of his faith and his lovingness.
If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your mind.

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The astronomer may speak to you of his understanding of space, but he cannot give you his understanding.
The musician may sing to you of the rhythm which is in all space, but he cannot give you the ear which arrests the rhythm, nor the voice that echoes it.
And he who is versed in the science of numbers can tell of the regions of weight and measure, but he cannot conduct you thither.
For the vision of one man lends not its wings to another man.
And even as each one of you stands alone in God's knowledge, so must each one of you be alone in his knowledge of God and in his understanding of the earth. (Gibran, 1995, 22-23)

The decision to consult students clearly indicates the fact that the opportunity to work on their own development provided teacher-researchers with the learning opportunity, not only of how to become better teachers, but also of how to improve their students' learning strategies. The students' learning, looking at it from this angle was seen significant. What is significant here also, is the teachers' effort to exercise sensibility in order to explore what techniques make possible for better learning to take place. This type of practice as Eisner (2000, p.355) explains is not a second-rate activity but rather a kind of activity, which exercises the most complex aspects of intellectual life.

III. Learning about the impact of their research on students' learning

As a result of their intention to investigate further, the participants had now planned to study the impact of their research on students' learning. They wanted to learn more about the effect of their innovation on students. This sort of assessment from the teachers' perspective was necessary for the researching teachers in order to modify their teaching approaches and help them make further adjustments in their future actions.

Fifty questionnaires were distributed to students who had done the writing course with the teacher-researchers in this study and had actively taken part in implementing the writing
techniques advocated by the EFL teachers. The questionnaires were distributed towards the end of school year. Around this time, many students stay at home studying for the final exams which are centralized and all students have to attend on specified dates in June. Perhaps this factor explains why not all students were able to come to school in order to return the questionnaires. Only 80% of the questionnaires were returned to the writing teachers. Nasreen had volunteered to gather students’ responses, analyze them and prepare a brief report to be presented to the group. The feedback gathered from the students’ questionnaire formed the basis for the future planning of improved instruction for the writing teachers. Students’ responses to the questionnaire were then made available for me to gain more insight into the process of students’ thinking and learning and also arrive at my own understanding and interpretation of how the whole process was conceived by the students. The students were also offered an opportunity to express their ideas (with open-ended questions) in Arabic with an understanding from the teachers that they wanted their students to have the ability to evaluate the whole process without worrying about the language barriers. Therefore, some students turned to Arabic to elaborate and clarify their thoughts. Some of the students’ comments and feedback are particularly interesting and insightful, and I felt it was significant to draw upon them. I translated some of the interesting comments they made and have relied upon my own interpretation to draw upon them as evidence of students’ learning. The data gathered from the teachers’ conversations in their regular meetings, their written responses to my questions sent to them in May, the teachers’ responses conveyed in the second interview in addition to students’ input form important evidence for the discussion about student learning. Two aspects of learning emerged from the above data, these are:

1. Improvement in the quality of students’ writing.
2. Improvement in students' attitudes toward writing and learning in general.

In the following section, I will deal with each aspect individually, relying on the above data.

III.1. Improvement in the quality of students' writing: Students' perspective

Looking at students' responses on the questionnaire, many of them reported that they could write better and had acquired more vocabulary to express themselves. They felt writing letters was an interesting task that allowed them to express their ideas freely. They also wrote that knowing that their teachers will not penalize them for making mistakes but rather direct them on how to improve their writing made them feel at ease with the writing process and able to write more. Some students added that not only the quality of their writing had improved, in terms of the length of writing and richness of vocabulary; their handwriting was also improving. Writing letters was seen as an occasion to communicate with their teachers by demonstrating the best of their efforts. They wanted to make sure that their teacher had no difficulty in reading their letters and responding to them.

III.2 The development of students' attitudes towards writing and learning

Spiker and Fraser (1999:141) write:

A recurrent theme in contemporary teaching and learning is the importance of focusing on the learner and of creating a learning environment, which encourages learners to assume responsibility for the progress of their own learning. It is fundamental in education that students learn to become independent of their teachers and that they should be in circumstances in which they are expected to make decisions about what and how they learn.

When I was reading the students' comments on certain items of the questionnaire, I was
impressed by the language students used to express their views about their learning and the
strength of their ability to comment on the writing techniques their teachers had used during
their course of writing. A significant aspect of learning that surfaced from the students’
comments was their attitudes towards learning. They all demonstrated a positive attitude both
toward their learning to write in English as well as their relationship with their teachers.
Below I will include an excerpt from the report, which Nasreen produced as a result of
analyzing the questionnaires. I will also draw upon some of the students’ comments, which I
translated into English to demonstrate the students’ attitude toward writing:

According to the analysis of the questionnaires, most of the students enjoyed writing letters
because it improved their relationship with their teacher. They said it was easier to write
letters to their teachers than other writing tasks because they felt since it’s a free writing, they
can say what they want and they felt that the teacher would be able to see their progress in
writing.

In terms of how the writing strategy teachers used helped them improve their writing, many
students wrote:
Now they can write better because they have learnt more, have improved vocabulary and can
discuss their problems with their teachers. (from Nasreen’s report, June 1997)

Some of the students’ comments are translated into English below:

“Yes, it made me get used to writing in English.”

“It made me improve my skills in reading and writing.”

“Yes, it helped me to brainstorm my problems and share them with my teachers and seek
help.”

“I developed my skills in letter writing”

“I’ve learned a lot of new words.”
“Writing is helping us learn more English.”

“Writing has helped me improve my skills by referring to a dictionary to learn and use accurate words.”

“My teacher helped me learn from my mistakes and helped me improve my writing.”

“I can write very well, I’ve known (means learned) a few words.”

“I’ve learned to write correctly and speak better.”

“Because writing letters need good writing and speaking skills to write better.”

“Yes, writing has helped me improve and develop my handwriting and learn more vocabulary.”

These students demonstrate important aspects of effective learning. They were placed in an environment that encouraged free expression of ideas; they had the choice of the style and approach of presenting their best writing ability and become the owner of the process. This sense of ownership of the learning process had an empowering effect on the students. This was reflected in the critical comments they made concerning their assessment of the writing tasks implemented by their teachers and in their ability to voice their learning needs as evidenced in the recommendations they made on the questionnaire with regards to what they felt would contribute to enhancing their writing skills. Another element that made the experience of writing enjoyable for students is the fact that they controlled what they wrote about to their teachers. In many EFL classrooms, students are usually required to write on topics, which they have very little interest in writing about. This, for many student writers,
can create anxiety and reluctance to express ideas freely. Many writing researchers point out that a supportive and friendly environment in which students feel free to take risks is essential. To make writing enjoyable, it is therefore important to help learners develop a favorable attitude towards writing. The students in this case had developed willingness to write because their teachers had been able to provide a supportive environment in which they were able to write in order to learn and improve their writing skills.

Another significant factor was the students' reaction to the task. They felt it was easier to generate letters than writing their other school assignments because they felt that the writing they were producing was authentic and generated a real need to communicate with some one else with a purpose. These points are significant and are widely supported by the EFL literature in the field of writing as a process. Writing experts such as Peter Elbow, Ann Raimes (1985) and Zamel (1983, 1987) emphasize that students' writing skills in a foreign language develop by writing genuinely and purposefully on topics they find interesting and have reason to communicate them to a known audience. It is argued that teachers should provide a supportive environment in the classroom in which students are encouraged to improve their writing by writing continuously and by sharing what they write without worrying about being penalized for their minor errors.

IV. Improvement in the quality of students' writing: Teachers' perspective.

The EFL group also identified some development in the students' writing, notably in the following aspects: length of writing, developing fluency, cooperating, and learning to become independent learners. These aspects of development that teachers identified were based on their assessment of the students' written work as well as their observations during
the writing lessons. I discussed these aspects with the teachers in the second interview in September. Unfortunately, I was not able to interview each teacher individually because of their tight schedules in school at the beginning of the school year. Only Shaima was able to meet with me by offering her after school hours and we met at her house one evening and had an interesting discussion assessing the whole research process. As for the rest of the group, and upon their request, I met with Nasreen, Hanadi and Mona together and I conducted the interview during which they were encouraged to reflect on the issues related to their learning as well as their students learning.

Minas: When you say students were improving, can you say in what ways they were better now?

Hanadi: Of course. This was a real opportunity for them to write in English. Some students’ writing improved and they were now writing lengthier letters (some up to three pages) and were expressing themselves well. They wrote about so many things. I mean not only about things related to their classroom life but also the outside world, their families, likes or dislikes and so many other things. (TI#2, September 1997)

Hanadi further illustrates other aspects of her students’ writing that she considered important. She maintains, “I feel students wrote more freely because they knew that this wasn’t part of the syllabus that they receive grades for”. In addition to improved writing, teachers’ comments also point to certain improvements in student learning in general. The following illustrate this:

Mona: You know they even used dictionaries to check the words, to check the spelling before they submit it to the teacher. This is important. They are learning to become better learners....They ask each other what words they need to use to express certain ideas.

Hanadi (interrupts): Yeh; they ask each other how would you say this in English. They usually ask the good students. They are keen and use very nice writing papers....
Mona: Their handwriting has also improved. It’s neat and it shows they are making effort to improve their handwriting as well as the quality of their writing. This of course is motivating to me. That’s why I want to continue with these strategies in my next course.

Minas: Mona, you are talking about one school year that seems encouraging to me!

Mona: Yes, and I saw them improving during this short period.

Nasreen: Students have certainly learnt to write personal letters and communicate their feelings, ambitions and information. I do feel I have been able to implement writing for a purpose by inviting not compelling students to write to me.

Nasreen was specifically encouraged to note that the writing strategy worked well, particularly for those whom she identifies as ‘weak students’. She maintains:

Writing letters in English was a task that many of my students enjoyed especially the weak students who don’t get to practice writing without being concerned about making mistakes. Many of my students write to me, and the best part is the letters I get from one of my weak students who has managed to write in good English. When I told her about her improved writing she explained that she asks a friend to proofread her writing before she hands it to me.

Hanadi adds:
The idea of implementing diary writing in the first semester was a success. Many of my students were competing to write and read to me some of their writing and I think that had a big impact in encouraging other students to compose and write in English even with mistakes. (T#2, September 1997)

In addition, to using questionnaires as a source of feedback on students’ improvement, the teachers also relied on the students’ writing samples to substantiate the students’ comments about their progress. Nasreen had asked her students to return their letters both to monitor their development as well as to share them with me as part of their data on learning in general. Looking at some of the samples of writing, I noticed that as students wrote more during the course, the lengthier were the pieces of writing they had produced. The letters they
had generated at the beginning of the project, tended to be brief with a lot of care in terms of avoiding making errors. Their writing later on during the second term, especially the writing samples of January onwards, appeared lengthier, in terms of quantity of writing and they contained more ideas, which were expressed in better English. The development of the ability to write more demonstrates an important quality of effective learning, the ability to take risks with the language and make efforts for effective communication rather than simply being constrained with the concern with accuracy at the expense of effective communication.

Although there is little evidence in these data of improved students learning as measured by standardized test scores, the teacher researchers in the study reported improvement in students' attitudes, involvement and learning as a direct result of the strategies implemented to enhance students' writing skills. The evidence for these changes is provided by the researching teachers through teacher observation, careful documentation of classroom writing activities, analysis of students writing samples and students' input to the questionnaire distributed at the end of the course.

Upon close examination of both the students' feedback to the questionnaire and the teachers' insights in their group discussions and interviews, there are a number of incidents, which indicate a significant type of learning that took place in this small context for both students and teachers. A positive experience that teachers' felt was the result of their collaborative effort in introducing an innovation into their practice.

Summary:

In this chapter, I examined the issue of teacher learning from the participants' perspective and explored their view of their learning and development. Another significant aspect
discussed was the development of teachers’ capacity to assess the extent to which their own innovation had influenced the learning situation of their students. We learned from the evidence presented in this case that the introduction of a different approach to the teaching of writing supported by the teachers’ reflection and inquiry created a positive learning opportunity for both the teachers researchers and their students.

In the next chapter, I will revisit the research questions that guided this study and discuss the lessons learned from this case. I will also discuss the significance of this case to the field of in-service teacher education and argue for the importance of a different model of teachers’ professional development in the light of the recent changes that the Bahraini government has introduced in my country.
CHAPTER 8

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED FROM THIS CASE STUDY

This case study reports on research conducted by a group of female Bahraini EFL teachers as a form of in-service professional development, situated within the school and aimed at exploring an alternative approach to the teaching of writing. The goal of the study was to explore an alternative form of professional development and was guided by the assumption that teacher initiated inquiries form a stronger basis for teacher development than more conventional practices. Data from various sources were gathered to generate a story line of how the teacher inquiry was enacted. These included the transcriptions of 1) the audio recording of the teachers' regular meetings throughout one academic year, 2) the teacher interviews conducted at the beginning of the study and at the end, 3) teachers' responses to a set of questions designed by the researcher and 4) documents gathered form teachers on student learning. These data suggest that as an innovation, the teachers' inquiry played a significant role in fostering teacher learning and professional development as well as contributed to creating a more positive learning experience for their students who participated along with their teachers to assess their own learning and the impact of the teachers' research on developing their writing skills.

The study was guided by the following research questions,

1. How is teacher research conceptualized and enacted by a group of Bahraini EFL teachers over a course of one-year self-directed professional development program?
2. How does teacher research from the perspective of the EFL study group contribute to development of individual teacher’s classroom practices?
3. What is the impact of teacher research from the perspective of the EFL study group
on students’ learning?

The case reported in this study reveals a number of issues concerning school based teacher development. In the sections that follow, I will reflect on the above questions individually and discuss the findings in relation to each question.

I. How teacher research was conceptualized and enacted: Format and content of the study

This case reported that a group of Bahraini EFL teachers who were approached by the researcher to work together and explore an alternative approach to learning and development willingly collaborated together and investigated problematic aspects of their teaching. Their decision was based on their need to solve a practical problem that they were all experiencing and that was the unsatisfactory standard of their students’ writing. This, I believe, was a significant starting point of their inquiry which re-emphasizes the importance of designing professional development activities that focus on issues teachers deem significant in their daily practice and that build and respect the knowledge and expertise teachers already possess. During one full academic year, teachers met regularly during which they discussed their approach to modifying their existing practice and adopting a different approach to the teaching of writing. The focus of their inquiry was to explore and introduce alternative approaches to the teaching of writing to help students develop their writing skills as well as improve their attitudes towards writing in English as a foreign language. In their regular meetings and the interviews with the researcher, the participants reported that their involvement helped them develop more confidence in their ability to influence their own
teaching circumstances. The transcriptions of their regular discussions reveal that the process of inquiry enabled the teachers to gain a greater sense of control over their work and demonstrated their ability to make decisions concerning how to handle the demands of the innovation they had introduced into their practice (in this case the different writing techniques).

*We learned from this case that the school's concept of professional development might not always be consistent with the teachers' understanding of how they might wish to work and develop.* As the case revealed, the participants willingly accepted to explore a form of professional development activity, which was not common in their context. From the outset of the project, they demonstrated willingness and enthusiasm to enhance their learning through an inquiry approach. I recall in our first meeting together at the start of the project, when I introduced the group to the concept of teacher as researcher as an approach to enhance teacher development, Nasreen, who was the most experienced teacher in the group expressed “well, as teachers we are always researching what we do”. Although, as a new form of professional activity, it was not a familiar mode to the participants, they easily related to the ideas raised in the initial workshops and valued the experience. They demonstrated commitment to their meetings and valued the discussions they had together as they revealed later in the interviews. The school, on the other hand did not act on this enthusiasm and willingness of teachers towards enhancing their own professional development. Teachers expected support and encouragement, yet they were faced with many other school expectations and duties which acted as obstacles rather than provided conditions for such an experience to blossom. The school’s view, reflected in the actions and decisions of the administration, revealed that although in theory, they valued the concept of self-initiated
professional development, in reality they were unable to understand its demands or the conditions by which such an experience might be fostered or supported in school. This was clearly revealed to me through the regular meetings I had with the principal in phase one of the study. In one of our discussions, the principal revealed that she had visited one of the participants' classes and had attended a writing lesson during which she was impressed by the students' interest in writing and the quality of the work they had produced (the teacher had shared with her samples of students' writing) but administrative support for teacher research remained lukewarm. The participants' conversations and interview data point out to the fact that the school was not able to see the value of what teachers were engaged in or see as Shaima, (one of the participants in the study) in a later interview raised that this was "a change process that teachers needed time to go through in order to understand it well and implemented it effectively". This variation in conceptualization creates a difficult working context. In the case of the study group, it created frustration and tension. The frustration was caused by lack of time to meet regularly. Teachers' group meetings were considered crucial for the participants in order to assess their techniques and provide each others with the necessary feedback to help them overcome some of the challenges of doing research as well as develop the confidence to explore alternatives. Furthermore, the lack of school support, either from the colleagues or school administration created in teachers the feelings of isolation in the sense of facing alone the difficulties associated with the introduction of an innovation.

Despite the lack of meaningful school support and acknowledgment at the school level, teachers continued researching their practice and accepting the challenges of coping with their teaching loads on the one hand, and the demands of the extra curricular activities on the
other. This was a significant aspect of the process, and further supports the notion that, as professionals, teachers have the capacity to initiate change and reform and have the ability to sustain the effort despite the lack of support and acknowledgement from the stakeholders in their work environment. The analysis of the study suggests that the following factors contributed to explaining the teachers’ determination to sustain their investigation:

1. The Teachers Identified Their Own Research Focus.

   The research topic for their inquiry grew out of the real need for investigating alternative approaches to solve an identified problem, which was the difficulties learners encountered in writing in a foreign language. When the participants agreed to take part in the study and investigate their practice, they all had a major concern and that was how to help their students to overcome the difficulties they had in communicating in written English. They felt that despite the fact that they spend countless hours teaching students how to write through numerous tasks assigned from textbooks, students are weak and reluctant to write genuinely. They believed improving their students’ writing skills was their priority and therefore decided to explore different techniques to help students’ communicate better in writing. The significant aspect was the recognition that, perhaps as writing teachers, they needed to rethink their approach to the teaching of writing and consider how to improve it. Therefore, the decision to investigate and implement alternative techniques was one of the factors that fostered in the teacher researchers the desire and ability to sustain their effort. Their aim was to find out the extent to which their innovation, in this case the writing techniques implemented, might actually confirm their assumptions about the role of alternative strategies.
in motivating students and creating the need for real-life writing. Identifying their research topic gave the study group the sense of ownership toward their research project.


    Teachers' discussions and reflections reveal the significance of working together in a group and sharing a common agenda for change and improvement. Nasreen, in her response to the questionnaire that was sent to the participants at the end of the school year wrote, “my colleagues’ support was crucial. Even the listening ear during our project meetings was helpful” (June, 1997). In the interviews, teachers reported that their involvement with the group helped them develop more confidence in their ability to influence their own teaching circumstances. They felt they had become proactive in dealing with difficult classroom problems and had developed more sensitivity towards their students. This clearly illustrates that listening to each other, sharing ideas and giving feedback all help teachers to develop new dispositions and skills to work collaboratively within a safe and collaborative group. This kind of learning is in congruence with the social constructivist theory, which recognizes dialogue and talk to be central to teacher learning. Collaborative and task focused talk is significant as it offers opportunity to clarify one's own meanings and offers social relationship that supports professional development.

    Furthermore, working together as a group, where all of the members are engaged in examining their teaching created a safe and supportive environment. When teachers feel safe and supported in these groups, communication among them becomes more authentic and informative than the daily talk in the staff rooms. Like these participants, teachers in Mitchell’s (1999) study reported that psychological safety contributed to their knowledge of
one another and to the development of willingness to participate in collective learning experiences. These sustained discussions with other teachers over long periods of time seem to be uncommon in Bahraini teachers’ previous experiences, yet were significant in helping them analyze their practices in depth. The fact that the participating teachers appreciated and valued these meetings and discussions contributed significantly to sustain the inquiry process throughout the year. The act of talking and learning together is considered central to teacher learning (Roberts, 1998) and is consistent with the social constructivist view which argues that collaborative and task-focused talk is significant as it offers opportunities to clarify one’s own meaning and offer social relationships that support changing views of self as teacher. In the context of teacher collaboration, Knezevic and Scholl (cited in Roberts, 1998, p.45) observe:

The process of having to explain oneself and one’s ideas, so that another teacher can understand them and interact with them, forces team teachers to find words for thoughts which, had one been teaching alone, might have been realized solely through action. For these reasons, collaboration provides teachers with rich opportunity to recognize and understand their tacit knowledge.

This position is strongly supported by clear evidence of teachers’ need for the right social relationships during professional change. Teachers in the “Project for Enhancing Effective Learning” in Australia made similar observations about the impact of collaboration overtime upon their inquiry. They reported that their regular meetings were necessary to offer them with on-going feedback and helped them develop a sense of ownership toward the project (Baird and Mitchell, 1992).

Another important factor that encouraged teachers to continue with their inquiry was the students' positive reaction towards this innovation. Through their classroom observations of the learning process, and through monitoring students' progress through their writing, teachers came to realize a positive change in students' attitude toward learning. Students' active involvement in the process and efforts to give feedback made the researchers pleased with the kind of learning that seemed to emerge in their classrooms. This outcome provided further impetus for the teachers to continue researching their own practice.

4. The Development of a Learning Community.

In addition to the positive learning environment that was created in their classrooms, a more positive gain for teacher-researchers was the development of a learning community in which they learned from each other and provided professional support to each other. This aspect of development was seen by the participating EFL teachers as valuable and more powerful in changing the way teachers viewed themselves as well as their practice. It has been argued that the presence of learning communities is significant to enabling a common agenda for change and improvement. The act of listening to each other during their discussions and exchange of ideas helped teacher researchers become flexible and open to different perspectives. Furthermore, the sharing aspect of their inquiry enabled teachers to appreciate the quality of the knowledge they generated with regards to the issue of introducing innovation. The data gathered on the teachers' inquiry point to the development of different aspects of their teaching and therefore, enhancing their professional development. In fact, this is a vital aspect of teacher research, which as Zeichner and Klehr (1999) have
argued is not widely documented in in-service teacher education literature.

II. The contribution of teacher research from the perspective of the EFL study group to development of individual teacher's practices.

As discussed in chapter 6, the idea of getting together on a systematic basis in order to discuss practical issues and improve their practice provided the participants' with conditions for the formation of an inquiry culture. This small learning community enhanced different aspects of teachers' learning and professional development. Below I will discuss the different aspects of professional development that were evident in the data.

11.1. The Role of Feedback in Enhancing Professional growth

As this case reveals, as a result of the decisions to alter their practice and improve their teaching, the teachers became aware of the power of feedback they provided each other in the process of implementing different strategies to improve the teaching of writing. Feedback helped teachers to act upon their concerns and cope with the challenges of doing things differently. The feedback that teachers were giving each other indicates that changing one's teaching significantly is a messy process and creates a lot of new expectations and responsibilities. For some teacher-researchers like Nasreen and Hanadi, for instance, their comments and observations in their group meetings revealed that they were building higher expectations for themselves and felt a sense of responsibility in responding to all students. On the other hand, the feedback they were getting from the group not only provided alternatives but also reassurance and collegial support to continue experimenting, modifying and improving their teaching strategies. The feedback also enabled teachers to deal with problems associated with some issues related to the teaching of a foreign language; for example how to
deal with students' errors, and how to best respond to students in order to help them both improve their writing as well as to maintain their enthusiasm for writing. These forms of support and feedback that teachers provided each other contributed to sustaining their research effort and enabled the participants to face the challenges of this novel experience.

II.2. The Development of the ability to understand the work context

Reflecting on teachers' effort to initiate a different form of professional development, we learn that the act of collaborating, reflecting and discussing practical problems enabled teachers to voice their concern about the reality of school structure as an obstacle to teacher initiated professional development and educational change. As discussed in chapters 6 and 7, there is evidence to support the claim that as professionals, teachers are willing individuals, capable of introducing and initiating innovations into their practice. Yet, despite the recognition that teachers are the key to educational reform and responsible for their own ongoing development, in reality, little is done to provide conditions for this kind of environment to be established in schools. For example, for the school in this study, which in my experience is representative of many girls' schools in Bahrain, the priority seems to be with how to present the school to public image as learning outcomes are measured by centralized annual examinations and are made available to public in support of the schools' claims. These kinds of practices confirm a focus on external accountability and profiling of learning and education in general. Professional development is still viewed as a process of providing quick solutions to practical problems suggested by outside experts rather than the gradual process of bringing about significant change. This dominant view of professional development is persistent in many educational contexts including Bahrain and it comes as no
surprise that while teacher researchers were striving for support and understanding and opportunities to work together, in order to discuss and implement innovation in their practice, they were faced by school resistance in terms of not providing context for such learning environment to prevail or sustain. Nevertheless, it becomes evident from this case that, as an alternative mode of teacher learning and as a valuable tool to bring about significant change in teachers' practices, teacher research appears a suitable option even under challenging circumstances.

However, to advocate teacher research as a model of professional development, we need to reconceptualize teacher development and consequently make efforts to set an agenda for teacher development as part of school's plan in a way that captures this new conceptualization. In many schools administrations, it is not clearly specified in their annual plan that time and resources be made available for teachers' professional development that is responsive to their own school and classroom needs. Professional development is still viewed as an act that is done to teachers by outside experts and therefore schools compete annually in conducting seminars and workshops where external experts (from the university or ministry of education or elsewhere) are called upon to run these activities. Often, it is the school principal who sets the agenda and decides what teachers need every year. Schools compete with each other with regards to how often they conduct such workshops or seminars (this is even reflected in daily newspapers, which publishes the event). Perhaps for some teachers, these activities are essential and one cannot argue that they are not useful activities. The danger is however, in the underlying assumption about how teachers learn and the direction to which teacher development should take. If we argue for professionalization of teaching, then we ought to view teachers' role differently. The present case reveals an empowering
effect on the participants in the sense that the group discussions enabled the participants to develop the ability to scrutinize their context and lead to some kind of political theorizing in terms of how teacher development is viewed, and how schools lack a clear vision about learning in general and teachers' professional development in particular. The group’s dialogues centered upon how the school objectives and concept of in-service development acted as an obstacle to teacher-initiated efforts for development and improved practice. The act of scrutinizing the reality of their working condition helped the participants develop awareness about the context of their work and an understanding of the importance of addressing such context as a component of introducing and implementing innovation.

Teachers, such as the ones in this study, have fewer opportunities to become reflective and critical subjects who put into place their vision of good teaching and schooling. Instead, they often find themselves implementing others’ agendas and coping with institutional structures in an attempt to survive. This survival mode not only places teachers, in many cases, at odds with their instincts and theorizing about the nature and importance of what should occur in classrooms, but also most importantly limits their possible resistance to wider structures that shape educational priorities in narrow and limiting ways. It seems important, therefore, to expect that teacher-initiated research projects allow teachers to interrogate the context in which they live and work. While the results of such scrutiny cannot be predetermined, it is possible that such inquiry will illuminate the relationship between school structures, teachers’ articulated vision for schooling and every day teaching practices. If teacher research is to result in progressive forms of school change that do not simply reproduce the school’s role in marginalizing teachers, such an analysis is essential because it puts into sharp relief the influence of contextual factors on teachers’ role and practices, and importantly provides a
foundation for active-resistance (in this case authoritarian power relations of these structures). While political theorizing develops teachers' ability to become more critical and analytic of their context, these positive gains may be short-lived as school structures continue to marginalize teachers. One possible solution is perhaps what Gitlin and Hadden (1997) put forward is for teacher research to foster collective relations. Teachers and other educators with similar interests and views join together to act on, and in some cases transform school structures that limit and constrain teaching and learning. What is needed, therefore, is providing contexts for teacher development and change to take place and celebrating teachers' efforts for introducing innovation into practice.

II.3. Learning to Cope with the innovation

As evidences indicate, not all of the teacher-researchers were implementing the idea of genuine writing in exactly the same manner. Some were using personal letter writing technique (such as Shaima and Nasreen) while others were using diary writing (like Hanadi and Mona). Each technique was generating different problems that teachers needed to resolve and think about strategies to enhance them. Those who implemented letter writing were quite excited with the kind of communication generated by such technique, yet felt frustrated because of the demand it made on their time in terms of responding to all those letters written by students. The teacher researchers were becoming sensitive not to discourage students by not responding to them as frequently as they wanted. At the same time, this was creating an extra load on top of their teaching commitments. As a result, this was creating tension in teachers, especially when they were unable to find enough time to respond to each student and structure their work accordingly.
The process of deliberation among the participants also generated a lot of discussions, which reflected the teachers' ability to critically examine their work context and scrutinize the reality of their teaching conditions. Through reflection on issues related to school structure, the teacher researchers reached the realization that the school structure created a culture, which was not conducive to teacher learning they were currently experiencing but rather fostered a more technical view of teacher and student learning. Although, as discussed earlier, efforts were made to create school wide support, the structural constraints remained unaltered. For instance, the school administration was involved through a workshop that was conducted jointly by the researcher and one of the teacher researchers to establish an awareness of what the group was aiming to achieve as well as to encourage school support. The feedback that was given in the workshop concerning the type of professional development activity proposed and enacted by the English Language teachers was quite positive and generated interesting discussions. In addition to this formal activity, the researcher also approached the school principal on a number of occasions to create awareness of what the group was engaged in as well as to clarify the importance of administrative support for teacher researchers. The meetings and the discussions with the school principal resulted in an agreement on her part to grant the participants half a day release time to enable the group to meet and work on their project. Unfortunately, the school did not act upon this agreement. Perhaps it was not found feasible or the school had other priorities in the second semester, which did not provide the opportunity for such a luxury.

II.4. Developing a different perspective of what learning entails.

As the case revealed, the research experience strengthened the teachers' capacity to
develop a different perspective of what their own learning entails as well as what student learning means. The idea of students being ‘active participants’ was certainly not new to the participants. Yet, it was through their inquiry that such a view was put into actual practice. Providing students with opportunities and conditions to take part in and control their learning process became significant as teacher researchers engaged in further discussions. Teachers in this case developed the awareness and sensitivity toward their students and viewed them as active members of the learning process. They learned that in order to improve their own learning, they needed to assess the impact of their innovation upon their students and provide evidence to validate and share with the rest of teaching community. The decision to include learners in the assessment process has an empowering effect on teacher research and supports the fact that in teacher research, learning is not simply a matter of exchanging new ideas and talking about them, or what Hargreaves (1996) calls “romanticizing”. Rather it is an act of bringing about gradual change in practice. This aspect of change was reflected in the way teachers viewed students’ improvement and consulted the students themselves to validate the extent to which their own learning experience was viewed as significant by students.

The process of investigating their practice also enabled teachers to re-examine their perception of their own learning and development. Previously, as the data from the first interview revealed, the participants viewed their own learning as the result of the limited learning opportunities provided by the external bodies as a form of in-service training on irregular basis. Yet, as they revealed in the interview, this type of learning had a limited influence in altering their practices significantly or forming a real need for change. This was due to the fact that in many cases, the teachers were not consulted as to the direction of these programs nor were they viewed as key actors in their own professional development process.
However, as a result of systematic inquiry, teachers realized the significance of learning from each other as a result of collaboration and inquiry in order to solve problems of practice. Among the most noticeable aspects of learning that teachers reported were the following:

- Developing self-awareness and the ability to make pedagogical choices on their own. This ability to make decisions reflects a sense of empowerment.

- Learning involves changing attitudes towards practice. As the data revealed in this study, the change of attitudes is reflected in the participants' willingness to accept other perspectives, to show sensitivity to others, to share ideas, and collaborate. It also involved learning from each other and adopting what works for others for the sake of improving the learning situation for their students.

- Learning to become researchers and continuous learners. As their dialogues revealed, teachers became conscious of the need to investigate the extent to which their own learning resulted in improving their teaching. They wanted to know how students assessed their ideas in order to incorporate these ideas in modifying their practice. The decision to design a questionnaire as a tool to involve learners in assessing their teaching techniques not only marks a positive outcome of investigating practice but also reveals how teacher-researchers developed an awareness of the importance of sharing their practical knowledge with a wider community of practitioners and communicate the significant outcome of their investigation to validate their professional development and learning.
III. The impact of teacher research from the perspective of the EFL study group on students' learning.

One of the significant changes reported in this study includes teachers developing a sense of confidence from conducting research, beginning to see themselves as learners, and developing closer relationships with their students and colleagues. The question of the impact of teacher research on students learning is explored both from the participants’ perspective as well as the students themselves. As data showed, the research process helped teachers become aware of the way they thought about their teaching and develop more personal connections to their students as a result of developing a deeper understanding of their roles, views and abilities. At the end of the project, the teacher-researchers reported that they now give their students more choice and responsibility in the classroom and have modified their teaching methods to allow for more student inclusion and involvement in curricula planning. This aspect of learning is consistent with the findings reported by Zeichner and his colleagues (1998) who investigated the impact of classroom action research conducted by a group of practitioners in Madison. Based on teachers’ written reports, they concluded that teachers felt the involvement in research helped them to develop confidence in their ability to bring about change into their classroom practice and valued the collaboration with their colleagues (cited in Zeichner and Klehr, 1999). Similarly, teachers in Bell and Gilbert (1996) study in New Zealand reported in the interviews that they continued to see themselves as learners and that they were learning alongside the students in their classrooms. This aspect of learning is significant and contributes positively to the teachers’ professional growth.

The case also revealed the teachers’ keen interest in assessing the extent to which their investigation influenced students’ learning. The analysis of data reveals a broadening
perspective as teachers reviewed their assumptions about student learning. Teachers, as it is usually the case in various educational contexts, make a lot of assumptions about curriculum, teaching and how knowledge is to be “delivered” to students. In many educational contexts, teachers continue to regard themselves, as the main “knower” and students’ role is identified mainly as the receivers of the knowledge teachers attempt to transmit to them. As we learned in this case, as the result of teachers’ inquiry into practice, teacher-researchers developed a different perspective about student learning and about the learners’ role in developing their own practice. The decision to investigate the extent of student learning reflects a different perception of students’ role. Learners were viewed as active participants, who played a significant role in developing the participants’ teaching practices, thus creating a different learning culture in this small context. This type of professional development represents a long-term investment in building the capacity of teachers to exercise their leadership abilities in order to improve learning both for themselves as well as for their students. For it is the combination of both pedagogy and content knowledge that is vital for a dynamic teaching and learning environment.

Moreover, the case points to some positive aspects of conducting research on practice from students’ point of views. The process of examining one’s practice, introducing innovation and involving learners in assessing their learning all point to the positive aspects of teacher-initiated professional development activity. As the data from the questionnaire as well as the teachers’ own regular observation of students’ work revealed, teachers’ techniques contributed positively to improving some aspects of the students’ writing skills. In particular, *it contributed in developing the quality of writing students produced*. More importantly, the data revealed that *student' attitudes towards their own learning changed by*
becoming more positive as the result of developing close relationships with their writing teachers. Baird and Mitchelle (1992) reported that students involved in the project developed positive attitudes toward their learning and gained increase confidence and motivation in themselves. This notion was also supported Bell and Gilbert (1996) who reported that students gained confidence and motivation to explore different learning activities, which were introduced by their science teachers in a project titled ‘Learning in Science Project’ which focused on New Zealand science teacher development as they learned and implemented new teaching activities.

Many definitions of learning seem to focus on outcomes; what the learner does differently. For many, learning is about change. To be meaningful, it is argued that learning has to be set within a context of social and personal rights and responsibilities and has to engage the active participation of the learner. It has to be placed within a context of social and personal relevance and has to engage the feelings, curiosities, needs and interests of the individual. Viewed from this angle, the active role that these students were assigned to and the opportunity that was provided for them to be part of the assessment process reflects the teachers’ awareness of what learning involves. The teacher-researchers now viewed their students differently and appreciated the knowledge students brought to their classes concerning the direction they wished their learning to take place. Their decision to include the students to assess their research process and its outcome marks another positive aspect of conducting inquiry into practice. This notion of learning is consistent with the social constructivist perspective, which emphasizes that knowledge is constructed, by teachers and students in a social context. This type of knowledge and understanding provides stimulation for teachers and enables them to view their classrooms with new insights.
IV. Reflection on the case

Learning about teaching, gaining ideas and possibilities, and monitoring outcomes require a lot of support from the school. We have learned from this case that teacher researchers did not receive any significant school support. Teacher researchers found this factor discouraging, and made them wonder what the actual learning meant to the school. They talked about prioritizing learning and discussed the possibility of going against the established norms in school, yet they were aware that the school with its current structure and agenda does not accommodate teacher research or recognize it as a powerful tool for teacher development. As Grossman (1992) has explained, the reasons underlying the constraints to teacher learning do not necessarily lie with the individual teacher, but with the lack of explicit structures to promote learning in the sense of bringing new knowledge to bear upon classroom practice.

*We also learned that teachers learn best by studying, doing, reflecting, and investigating how students learn and by sharing this knowledge with each other.* We noted that systematic inquiry enabled teachers to develop their capacity to assess their own learning and learn how to improve their research techniques. Teachers in this case learned that the act of inquiring into practice consists of a series of reflective thoughts, decisions and actions which aim at providing a better picture of the claim of how much learning has taken place whether for students or for themselves.

There is no question about the willingness of teachers, as individuals who possess the capacity to inquire systematically into the nature of their practice and their power to initiate and sustain change. However, when examining the reality of schools, it becomes evident that
many schools do not provide conditions for including teachers as part of decision making in the sense that they are handed the responsibility for envisioning, planning or acting on their development and learning. The school structure is not organized in a way to accommodate teachers’ initiativeness or take their efforts of development seriously. As Hobson (1996) explains, schools are simply not organized to facilitate interaction among teachers. Choosing a degree of isolation is a way to fend off the disruptions and distractions that so often come from being too caught up in an overwhelming system. He, along with other researchers (e.g. Acker, 1999), maintain that teachers want to collaborate, and are very interested in sharing practice and even eager to do so, yet in many schools, there is often little time and less reward for teacher talk. In this study, teacher talk is perceived as a means of diagnosis, a time to think out loud, to explore, to analyze and to problem solve. Teacher time involves time to listen, to share and to interact (see also Acker, 1999).

As evident in this study, when teachers are provided with an opportunity to voice their uncertainties, and problems in a safe environment, they are eager to talk and share practice and think about their everyday teaching lives. They can give each other a kind of feedback available from no other source that reduces their anxiety about being effective teachers. Rather than the more usual “listening to the experts” approach that seems to characterize so much of formal teacher development programs, teachers seem most open to the teachings and wonderings of their colleagues. They listen closely to the stories that seem to come from an experience base that all can recognize. Teachers can give each other a hearing and can offer each other empathy, understanding and practical help.

Perhaps another reason for the lack of structural support is the institutional expectations. Schools expect immediate outcomes and because many school administrations have not yet
conceptualized what effective teacher development is they still measure any effort exhibited by teachers to the extent to which these efforts result in tangible outcomes. For instance, in this case, the key issue is students' immediate improvement as measured by the school's standardized exams, or whether or not the teachers have come up with a proposal or developed material which can be published by the school. This then would be perceived as evidence (i.e. makes the school accountable in the ministry) or proves to other school communities what the teachers have accomplished. What is lacking here is a realistic conceptualization of what true learning is or what teacher development is. The schools need to review their understanding of what is meant by teachers' professional development and how best it can result in achieving its goals, improving the status of learning for students. Therefore, in order to facilitate an alternative route to teacher learning and professional development, there is a need for restructuring schools in a way to accommodate a different learning environment. Some might argue that change is complex especially in contexts where a lot of decisions are made centrally. Therefore, unless change is introduced top-down and implemented as another responsibility for schools to be added to their agenda, it will not succeed or will not lead to sustainable change in school practices. However, looking at this from practitioners' views, top-down change will naturally be supported by teachers who are accustomed to abiding the rules of their career yet, as Acker (1999) discusses, how it is understood and how much of change is truly implemented or accepted is another issue. In the Bahraini context, despite a recent call for a more democratic school practices, the most important actors in this process - the teachers - are yet not considered as essential key actors in bringing about significant institutional change. I believe that a certain degree of this sort of change becomes a necessity for teachers at least for accountability purposes. Head and Taylor
(1997, p.150) assert,

People who decide to take control of their own development may be in a stronger position both to initiate the kind of changes they would like for themselves and to hold on to an inner sense of direction admit the pressures that external change forces upon them.

Advocators of change argue that all change within schools begins with teachers. Teachers are the key to unlocking the future. Like most complex endeavors, in order to get better at change efforts, we have to practice it in purposeful and exploratory manner. As the case revealed, the participants in this study were grappling with the change process. It is essential that those outside the school come to recognize the power of schoolteachers to initiate change within their schools. But individual teachers shouldn’t wait for that to happen, because institutions do not change themselves. Educational change as many educators argue is a slow, social and never ending process, not an event. Going through our own change may give us more understanding of change and how others experience it. This insight can help us more readily facilitate change in others (Head and Taylor, 1997, p.174).

In the final section of this chapter, I would like to discuss the importance of this case study in the light of the changes that the country has recently undergone and argue for the necessity of adopting a different approach to teachers’ in-service development.

V. Conclusion: reflection and implications of this study

As I reflect back at the beginning of this project in 1996, I realize how the teaching conditions were different in Bahrain then. Thinking back of my own experience as a senior teacher, and my assessment of my own learning and professional needs, I always felt that teacher development needed a different orientation and conceptualization. My motive for
advocating a different mode of teacher development, although emerging purely from an individualistic desire, was aimed primarily in exploring an alternative approach to professional development and creating a different culture of learning for teachers in schools. I felt my own frustration and dissatisfaction with many teacher-training programs justified the move toward other modes of teacher learning in which teachers play a central role, and gain more authority and power to voice their learning needs or their practical concerns. Looking at the situation in Bahrain today, there is a greater need for the re-examination of the way the professional development of teachers is conducted or conceptualized and teacher research seems even more appropriate and a necessity than before. The changes that the country has undergone in recent years have placed educators in a critical position and have created the need for a new vision of education in the country.

On 14th February 2000, His Highness Sheikh Hamad Bin Essa Al Khalifa, the Amir of Bahrain then, took an initiative to restore democracy in the country and decided to activate the National Charter Action, setting the scene for the move towards a more democratic society. With this came a plan toward establishing the country's parliament, which had been closed down since 1975. This movement toward a different form of political practice was supported by the majority of Bahrainis who voted for the National Charter and looked forward to the new reform program. Among the many changes that have been introduced in the country since then are 1) studying the unemployment problem, 2) examining the human right issues and 3) reviewing the status of women in Bahrain. One of the significant gains for women has been granting them the right to actively participate in the political activities in the country such as the right to take part in the country's elections for the parliament.

All of these vast changes at the level of the government have necessitated the need for
officials of education to re-examine a number of significant issues related to the preparation of Bahraini students and teachers to fulfill their new roles and responsibilities. Issues such as citizenship education and democracy are widely discussed and deliberated between the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders in the country. The major quest has been how to prepare our children to transform smoothly toward a more democratic society in which they understand their rights and duties and can express their ideas critically and effectively. This vision of learners as active citizens requires serious reconsideration of the role of teachers, who in this case are the key to implementing this type of change in their classrooms or school context. Along the same line comes the need for teacher educators and those responsible for teacher preparation to review their strategies and their vision of what it means to be a teacher in this challenging and transforming context as well as how to prepare teachers to act effectively to fulfill the demands of the transforming society. One of the important issues that need immediate consideration is the reconceptualization of the roles teachers are expected to play in their own education. This reconceptualization should be based on viewing teachers as individuals who are capable of generating knowledge about practice and contributing effectively to the development of curricula as well as the development of better working conditions for themselves. This is consistent with the overarching move to democratizing institutions in Bahrain.

The present case study is significant in the sense it demonstrates that change, as both Sarason (1990) and Acker (1999) write, is a constant in schools. Individual teachers innovate and make deliberate changes in their pedagogy. Under favorable circumstances, teachers are willing and capable of leading the direction of their own learning and therefore, can act as powerful agents for educational change. Teachers' own investigation of practice as
documented in this study forms an important source of teacher learning and professional
development as well as contributing positively to the improvement of learning for students.
This form of activity is significant and should be adopted as an approach and made available
for teachers as an alternative route to their development.

This case also reveals the fact that teachers work better when they are not mandated but
rather initiate their own professional development programs. This ownership of the process
increases teachers' motivation to work toward attaining their goals and contributes to the
sustainability of teacher-based professional development activities. This sort of development
however, requires certain modifications of schools in order to facilitate this mode of staff
development. Perhaps what is needed is to increase the autonomy of schools, that means that
the influence of authority on the educational process (through input factors such as school
regulations, time structures, assessment methods) is reduced. Instead, the decision making
power should be handed down to schools and to the individual teachers. Consequently, the
public interest grows to hold teachers accountable for the educational process and its
outcome. In this case, teachers will be required to provide evidence for the quality of their
work. These kinds of challenges produce considerably higher demands on teachers than their
traditional task as transmitting predefined sets of information.

Moves toward a more dynamic learning culture imply that teachers have to involve
themselves in reflection on educational aims and practices that is, researching both classroom
as well as the school as a whole. It also implies a move from 'first order change' to 'second
order' change (Cuban, 1988). Second order change implies that teachers are not only
expected to become more effective and efficient in carrying out their tasks, but also to reflect
on aims, and if necessary modify them. Moreover, they will have to reflectively tap an
increasing variety of sources of knowledge and experience in the school environment. These challenges ask for a reconceptualization of the professional tasks for the teachers. This kind of move however, is not easy. Posch and Gottfried Mair (1997) explain that one reason is the difficulty of abandoning technical rationality or what they call the ‘doctrine of transferability’ and adopting a reflective approach. The doctrine of ‘transferability’ implies that innovations are developed outside of school context and then transferred to schools. Whereas creating a reflective environment implies that local initiatives already exist within the school and their growth process requires structural support through enabling teachers to conduct their inquiries. Somekh and Thaler (1997) however, warn that the research process should not be focused on the individual’s perspectives of a social situation. Instead, to enlarge the potential power of teacher research to affect the change process, stakeholders such as parents, administrators or students should be involved in the research process. In the Bahraini context, this type of focus is necessary especially at the early stages of adopting such an approach. Perhaps including an external research partner in promoting research and establishing support is necessary. My own experience with the research group in this case study validates the importance of this kind of support. An external partner whether from the Ministry of Education or the University taking part in the research process strengthens teachers’ effort in understanding and coping with change. This partnership, however, should not be based on manipulating the teacher researchers to act in a certain way but rather on a mutual understanding and open discussions. This means that teachers have the full ownership of the process and set the agenda for their inquiry.

In addition to adopting a more reflective stance for in-service teacher learning, a similar learning culture is required in pre-service education. In Bahrain, many teachers start their
career and are given the most demanding teaching loads with the greatest amount of extra
duties with no mentoring or any form of significant support. Because of this, new teachers
merely learn to cope with their demanding context rather than making effort to learn on their
own or with others. Furthermore, they are expected to know everything about their job or
learn them through short courses or workshops offered by the ministry. They rarely have the
instructional opportunities to observe and analyze teaching with their colleagues.

Therefore, what is needed is to create new models of ongoing professional development
for teachers. These feature mentoring for beginning teachers and veterans, peer observation
and coaching, local study groups and networks for specific subject matter areas, teacher
academies that provide on going seminars and courses of study tied to practice, and school-
university partnerships that sponsor collaborative research, interschool visitation and learning
opportunities developed in response to teachers and principals’ felt needs.

Furthermore, there is a great need for the restructuring of schools from within to
accommodate teacher inquiries as a valuable tool for teachers’ continuous learning. Many
have argued that schools, as they are currently functioning, are unable to foster continuous
teacher development (Shulman, 1986; Fullan, 1991; Grossman, 1992). This means that those
individuals who possess power and authority in school to initiate change, especially the
school principal, need to review their conceptions of teachers’ professional development in
this rapidly changing era. This new understanding requires a process of negotiation with
teachers and viewing them as experts who are capable of planning and setting the direction
for their own professional development. It has been argued that if the goal of the school is for
students to become active learners, then, to teach effectively, conditions should be provided
for teachers themselves to become active learners as well. As discussed earlier, to achieve
this, efforts should be made to provide context for continuous learning and granting teachers
with the following types of significant necessary support:

1. Administrative support.

2. Technical support.

3. Professional support.

As it was evident in this case, the issue of time played a crucial role in teacher learning. Time is a fundamental resource in structuring the teachers’ work. If the goal is to transform the culture of the school to a more collaborative and inquiry-oriented culture, then time should be invested towards this goal. As the teacher-researchers taught us in this case, the leadership support is the key in providing context for such a culture. Even when the school has a weak learning culture, principal can make a start by wondering about issues that are of concern to teachers, providing support for teachers and celebrating learning.

Another important development is school-support teams. There have been a lot of discussions about university – school partnership. As mentioned earlier, working together, university consultants and teachers facilitate learning and development in school. Teachers can also learn by teaching other teachers. These types of professional support are significant and unfortunately not invested in widely. The Veteran teachers can act as mentors, co-researchers and teach their novice colleagues the art of teaching and how to cope with its practical problems.

Technical support is another type of important support necessary to facilitate teachers’ continuous learning in schools. This kind of support is not usually discussed widely in the literature of in-service teacher education. One aspect of technical support is the physical resource available in school such as TVs., computers, or a resource center for teachers, a
place where they can meet and read the relevant literature to their work or simply have conversations about issues that they consider important in their practice. Unfortunately, many schools in Bahrain lack resource centers for teachers, where teachers can access the relevant literature. The absence of such facilities undoubtedly passes a certain message to teachers concerning their in-service learning and professional development. Therefore, one important element of the administrative support is the importance of restructuring school’s financial management in order to accommodate the establishment of a learning culture, where teachers can easily access the relevant literature to their work.

Another aspect of the technical support is the school administration itself. The issue here is whether or not there is adequate administrative support and how much efforts are invested by school to enable teachers to adopt a more reflective stance in their practice. In many schools, in addition to the heavy loads of classroom teaching, teachers are expected to carryout other administrative tasks that many consider irrelevant to real teaching or learning. The most important questions are: do teachers have release time once in a while to engage in projects and initiate their own development? And how much time is specified in a school year for teacher development projects? Time is without doubt, the most difficult commodity to obtain but is the most essential. Here the leadership and management capacity of those in school is important. In the end, as Zeichner and Klehr (1999) have asserted, the quality of learning for students in schools will largely depend on the quality of opportunities available for teachers’ professional development. While it is appropriate and necessary at times for policy makers and school administrators to set directions for reform and to provide teachers with the skills and content needed to carry them out, there must also be a place in teachers’ lives for the kind of professional development that has been discussed in this study
respects and nurtures intellectual and leadership capacities of teachers.

Although the present study does not provide evidence of the impact of the teacher-research on changing the school culture, it is unrealistic as Hollingsworth (1997) asserts, to expect that the hierarchies of educational institutions will shift in a way to put teacher-research at the center of educational reform. However, the personal changes which accompany discovery of self with others are significant and seem to last. The kind of professional development described in this study represents a long-term investment in building the capacity of teachers to exercise their judgment and leadership abilities in order to improve learning for themselves as well as for their students. It is not a form of in-service teacher education that will produce quick fixes for the complex and ongoing problems of schooling, nor will it compensate for the unsatisfactory working conditions necessary for the educational success of all students. Yet, when it is organized and supported according to the kinds of key conditions discussed earlier, teacher research can become a powerful professional development experience of great importance to teachers that has a clear impact on teaching and learning.
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