COLLABORATIVE TEACHER INQUIRY AS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:
CONCEPTS, CONTEXTS AND DIRECTIONS

by

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the concepts, contexts and directions of collaborative teacher inquiry as one form of professional development for teachers in British Columbia's K-12 public schools. The study is based on work conducted within the Research Division of the BC Teachers' Federation over a fourteen-year period, and includes consideration of the union's role and potential in supporting teacher inquiry. A diverse range of literature which impacts on teacher inquiry is considered: the literature on Action Research and professional development, networks and collaborations, concepts of 'good' schools; and teacher unions.

Four inquiry projects conducted between 1992 and 2002 provided data showing the evolution of union-initiated inquiry involving teams of teacher-researchers and the author of this study, as the facilitator of these groups. Two inquiry projects conducted between 2002 and 2006 also provide sources of data. These projects involved the teachers' union in partnerships with school districts and a university.

The study provides empirical evidence which makes a case that collaborative teacher inquiry has demonstrated value to teachers who engage in it as a form of professional development, and that value accrues to the education systems in which those teachers work. Benefits to teachers which are demonstrated in this study include a greater sense of professional efficacy, reduced isolation, and a belief that students benefited from the teachers' inquiry.
The study finds that contexts in which inquiry occurs may be of greater significance than is generally accepted in the literature. Context - from school design to levels of organizational support or apathy - needs to be better understood by those undertaking teacher inquiry, and some ways of understanding context and its influence on teachers' practices are illustrated in this study. The move from private to public space by participation in inquiry groups was of major significance for both individuals and organizations, as it allowed for ideas to be challenged and judgment developed.

These factors strongly suggest that the inquiry experience is one of professional, not staff, development, with the professionalism and autonomy of the learner respected, and with participants taking control of their own learning needs.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.............................................................................................................................................. ii

Table of Contents.................................................................................................................................. iv

List of Tables........................................................................................................................................ vi

Acknowledgements............................................................................................................................... vii

Dedication............................................................................................................................................. viii

CHAPTER I Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 1
  1.1 Collaborative Teacher Inquiry as Professional Development: Concepts, Contexts and Directions .............................................................. 1
  1.2 Reflections on 30 Years of Teaching and Inquiry Approaches ........................................................................................................... 5
  1.3 Overview of Thesis ......................................................................................................................... 11
  1.4 Limitations to the research ......................................................................................................... 13

CHAPTER II Literature Review .......................................................................................................... 14
  2.1 Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 14
  2.2 Forms of Teacher Professional Development, With an Extended Focus on Teacher Inquiry/Action Research ...................................................... 15
  2.3 Action Research as a Form of Teacher Inquiry and Professional Development .................................................................................. 34
  2.4 Networks and Collaborations in Education and Business ................................................................................................................. 56
  2.5 Good Teaching and Good Schools: ‘Public’ and ‘Private’ Space in Schools and Society, and the Connections to Teacher Inquiry and Professional Development ........................................................................... 69
  2.6 Teacher Unions, Teacher Inquiry and Professional Development .................................................................................................. 92
  2.7 An Examination of Teacher Unions: Critiques, Supporters, and the Role of Unions in the Support of Professional Development ........... 93

CHAPTER III Research Methods ....................................................................................................... 101
  3.1 Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 101
  3.2 Data Retrieval, Collection, and Analysis .................................................................................. 102
  3.3 Significance of the Study ......................................................................................................... 119
  3.4 Teacher Inquiry: Four BCTF Projects, 1992-2002 .................................................................... 124

CHAPTER IV The Multiliteracies Project, 2002-2006 ................................................................. 171

CHAPTER V Focus Group Data Collection, 2006 ........................................................................... 209

CHAPTER VI Discussion .................................................................................................................. 244
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Four BCTF Teacher Inquiry Projects, 1992-2002 ........................................ 4
Table 2: 1992-2002 Data collection methods ......................................................... 104
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The journey described in this study could not have been made without the many teachers and other educators who shared it. Their professionalism demonstrated during these inquiry projects has enriched not only the learning and lives of their students, but also the British Columbia public education system.

I wish also to thank my supervisory committee (Dr Margaret Early, Dr David Coulter and Dr John Willinsky) for their constant encouragement, knowledge, and for those occasional prods that only good critical friends can administer. I also wish to thank Dr Margaret Early, my Supervisor, for many fascinating conversations about teaching, learning and inquiry.
DEDICATION

To Joan, for her love and support

during this and many other journeys
CHAPTER I  Introduction

1.1 Collaborative Teacher Inquiry as Professional Development: Concepts, Contexts and Directions

This study explores collaborative teacher inquiry as professional development. It traces my professional involvement with this form of inquiry in projects over a thirty-year period. By reflecting on this experience over time, and collecting, retrieving and analyzing empirical data over a fourteen-year time span, the first phase of the study asks the question ‘what is the nature of collaborative teacher inquiry in which teachers have engaged in these projects?’ In exploring the nature of particular experiences of collaborative inquiry this study will consider the intellectual, social and educational features of the experiences, linking these to professional learning concepts. Having more clearly ascertained the nature of collaborative inquiry, later phases will consider its value by asking ‘how valuable is teacher inquiry in supporting teachers’ learning and professional development?’ This question connects to the literature on the nature of adult learning, professional learning communities and Action Research. The study will link the ‘means’ of inquiry not only to the ‘ends’ of teachers’ learning, but also to consideration of the needs of students and the purposes of schooling. In this discussion, a connection will be made between empirical data collected in this study and the literature on good teaching and good schools, and the connection of these areas to teacher inquiry and professional development.

Because much of this inquiry has moved teachers (and myself as a researcher) from largely individual and private space to a space which is more public, two connected questions will be asked: ‘how does collaborative inquiry move teachers into a more
public space, and why might that have value for those engaged and for the systems in which they work? These questions will link to the literature on private and public spaces in schools and society, which considers why these are important to the development of the individual and why they connect to at least one perspective on what constitutes good teaching and good schools in a public education systems.

Because I work within a teacher union organization, and because some teacher inquiry projects have involved collaboration with external organizations such as school districts and universities, I will also consider the union’s role in supporting teacher inquiry, and its external collaborations. The union’s role is not a part of the empirical data collection but consideration will be given to questions such as: “Should and how might teacher unions support teacher inquiry?” “How might teacher unions collaborate with other organizations such as school districts and universities to build inquiry approaches?”

While the questions focus on teacher unions, the exploration of these questions might be considered by any organization with an interest in teacher inquiry, such as a university or a school district. The reflections on the role of teacher unions link to the literature on teacher unions, and the perennial debate on the professional-industrial dichotomies of teacher unions. They also connect to different literatures in education and in business which describe the increasing need for networking and collaboration between organizations and why this is relevant to teacher unions and other organizations as they consider planning for the future.
In identifying phases within this thirty-year frame, I will reflect on my experiences with collaborative inquiry since the mid-70s. However, the empirical data is collected, retrieved and analyzed from a shorter period of time – the 14 years between 1992 and 2006. The period 1992-2002 will be considered through a focus on four BCTF teacher inquiry projects which I managed and facilitated.

These projects, from 1992-2002, have been selected because they illustrate a range of approaches to collaborative teacher inquiry, and because they provide data which allows for a better understanding of what such inquiry includes. Data collected from field notes, document retrieval and other sources not only builds better understanding of the components of inquiry but is intended to allow for a consideration of whether any evolution in terms of methods, skills and reporting occurred over the ten-year span.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project title</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Number of teachers</th>
<th>Focus</th>
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<tr>
<td>Partners for Inclusion</td>
<td>1992 - 1994</td>
<td>Pervasive problems with Inclusionary practices.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Description of good Inclusionary practices in recognizable school environments</td>
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<td>Elementary/secondary schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Research - Assessment</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>How to address a growing debate across the province on approaches to assessment</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Teachers reflected on and wrote about their assessment practices</td>
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<td>Elementary/secondary schools</td>
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<td>Fraser-Cascade Teacher Research</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>After a BCTF training course on Action Research, teachers in a rural school district requested BCTF facilitation for an Action Research project</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Elementary teachers examining various areas of practice, including using drawing to develop aboriginal students’ writing, and mathematical problem-solving</td>
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<td>Elementary schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nanaimo/Coquitlam Study</td>
<td>2002 - 2003</td>
<td>Funding, legislated and contractual changes introduced by the provincial government.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Study examined the effects of legislated and funding changes on students’ learning and teachers’ work, with a focus on special needs and ESL services</td>
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The research projects considered between 2002 and 2006, also involving the union, are the projects “From Literacy to Multiliteracies: Designing Learning Environments for the New Economy”, and the “Teaching to Diversity” project. The first of these, Multiliteracies, was a partnership of the University of British Columbia, the University of Toronto (OISE), Peel and York School Boards (both in Ontario), the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation, and the Vancouver School Board. The research was funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). The ‘Diversity’ project was a collaboration involving the BCTF and three BC school districts – Nanaimo, Prince George and Coquitlam.

The purpose of this research is to develop understanding and learning from experience and from an extensive range of empirical data in order to consider whether a case for supporting teacher inquiry as professional development can be justified based on the evidence provided in this study. It will consider whether the experience of collaborative inquiry benefits those who participate, has any connection to students’ learning, and whether educational systems should consider individual or collaborative support for inquiry approaches as professional development.

1.2 Reflections on 30 Years of Teaching and Inquiry Approaches

I started teaching in September 1974, at a state comprehensive school in the industrial city of Sheffield, in the north of England. The school leaving age had just been raised from 15 to 16, resulting in many unhappy teenagers forced into another year of schooling. They were mostly young people disaffected with schooling, and predominantly working-class. Few teachers wanted to teach these students, and I became one of many new teachers fresh out of post-graduate teacher training programs who were recruited to teach
them. There was no curriculum, few books, and minimal interest or support from the school's administration. But several other teachers did take an interest in both those students and the inexperienced teachers working with them. Such interest fed my first experiences of reflective practice, usually in the local pub where everybody assumed but did not articulate the role of critical friend.

Some years later I was hired to teach in a program for unemployed youth in inner-city Melbourne, Australia, where my penchant and affinity for disaffected teenagers continued, as did my reflections with a vibrant and committed community of teachers working in similar programs across the state of Victoria. Our reflections on practice were extended when we initiated an Action Research network across our programs in different Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges, the Australian equivalent of Canadian community colleges. Our Action Research projects connected teachers in a close-knit community in Melbourne and across the state of Victoria, while also linking with a group of academics from Deakin University, including Stephen Kemmis and Rob Walker. At the same time our community of teachers became active teacher unionists, pushing what we considered an apathetic union to have more interest in our professional issues and in the issues affecting the students with whom we worked. Thus I found that two areas of interest (reflective practice and teacher unions) developed and were connected, in my mind at least. Should a teacher union support my professional needs and interests or should its focus be purely industrial, with emphasis on pay and benefits? My answers were 'yes' to the first question and 'no' to the second. My union's answer was the reverse, or so it appeared to me at the time.
Moving to Canada in 1988 and starting graduate classes at Simon Fraser University, I took an Action Research course with Ken Zeichner, and collaborated with a teacher on an inquiry project using still photographs as data for reflection on practice. Graduate classes were, it seemed to me at the time, an opportunity to break from the constant pressures of teaching and take some stock of what I was doing as a teacher, and why. By taking one Action Research course and by reflecting on practice during the whole period of graduate studies, I furthered my interest in approaches to teacher inquiry and reflective practice.

Fifteen years ago I finished my first period of graduate studies and started work with the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) in their newly-formed Research Division. As a union member in England and Australia I had always supported the basic concept of unions yet been troubled by the various teacher unions in which I was a member. They seemed monolithic and slow to respond to changing membership needs and new educational contexts. They were, it seemed to me, run by grey men with rigid ideas and little humour, who gave speeches as dull and pretentious as those offered by equally grey figures who topped the educational hierarchies on the management side. As young teachers we aimed to change all that, and while we failed, we enjoyed most moments.

Starting my work with the union I found a different context, fewer grey men and more women of influence in the union. I was encouraged by the BCTF’s professed stance on and support for professional issues, with its Provincial Specialist Associations (PSAs) and a Professional Development Division. But structures and statements only tell part of any union story, as I had learned in Australia. The real stories emerge from analyses of funding, programs, and staffing. Whatever the real balance between industrial and
professional focus within the union that now employed me, I had an opportunity to promote and support teacher inquiry as union research, collaborating with teachers. In thinking back to this time, I realize that I proposed such collaborations as appropriate union approaches to conducting research. My aim was to combine whatever skills I had developed for research with the knowledge and experience of teachers who were working every day in classrooms, but to do this as a partnership between peers, with support in the form of facilitation and some form of 'critical friendship' to generate inquiry and to share such efforts through publications. This approach resonated with and was supported by the union, albeit with low levels of project funding.

Engaging in and supporting teacher inquiry has been of interest for me over the last 15 years of my work with the union, and will inform this study. But my interest and approach, while sanctioned and funded by the union, also takes place within a context of union shifts and changes, where the union’s emphasis and support for teacher inquiry has ebbed and flowed over time. I will return to this issue of union emphasis and support both in the Literature Review and in the Discussion sections of the study.

In thinking back over the thirty years since I started teaching I realize that periods of teaching, academic study, and union employment, have all included engaging in and supporting teacher inquiry. They involved reflecting on my own practice, and engaging in collaborations with school districts and universities, while managing, facilitating, and disseminating information about teacher inquiry projects. I have frequently thought about the actual and potential roles of teacher unions, school districts, and universities in supporting teacher inquiry.
Thirty years of working in educational settings has therefore included experiences and reflections which will form one part of this research, as will the collection and analysis of empirical data over a fourteen-year period. As I access literature in a range of areas such as inquiry or collaboration, and conduct empirical research in this study, I will use my own experience and voice as a form of triangulation to consider the themes, arguments and conclusions in these areas within the context of my own life and work.

About five years ago my perceptions of teacher inquiry were becoming formed like an image. Such an image included concepts, or notions of inquiry; practical approaches which built on experience over time; dissemination which involved inviting a wider community and public to consider and critique both concept and approaches. The frame for this image included two contexts. The first was the reason inquiry occurred – concern with or interest in an educational issue such as inclusion, or assessment of student learning. The second context was the support offered by organizations such as the union, school districts, or universities. What was the nature of such support, and how did different organizations collaborate to support inquiry? The metaphor of the image is used because while such an ‘image’ was forming, it was not totally clear. Hence the need for this research to better develop and clarify the image through reflection, data collection and analysis.

This study does not involve the stating of any claim about collaborative teacher inquiry at the outset. Rather, it seeks to explore the nature of such inquiry and the contexts in which it takes place and considers the role of a teachers’ union in supporting teacher inquiry. As stated above, this exploration is informed by personal experience in inquiry over time, by
document retrieval and analysis of data collected between 1992 and 2002, and by more recent data collection and analysis between 2002 and 2006. It is also informed by analysis of a range of literature which considers forms of inquiry and collaboration. It explores the nature of various collaborative inquiry projects in terms of approaches and value for those participating, and possible benefits for students and educational systems. It explores a perceived shift from teachers working in a private space to moving into more public spaces through inquiry. “Private” space or place refers to work environments where a teacher essentially works without peer discourse or some explicit sharing of pedagogical approaches, either while teaching or in reflections on teaching. “Public” spaces or places are those in which teachers are engaged in some form of peer discourse, or where teachers are making their approaches more public, perhaps through presentations. There may be degrees of moving into a more public place or space, such as dialogue with a colleague, engagement in an inquiry group, or presenting and publishing. The purpose of this research is to generate improved collaborative inquiry approaches for the future by better understanding inquiry concepts and contexts, and by considering whether and how organizations such as teacher unions, school districts, and universities should or might better support teacher inquiry as a form of professional development.
1.3 Overview of Thesis

Chapter 1 includes personal reflections on my teaching and educational career and how the concept of teacher inquiry became of interest to me in my work. The chapter states the three research questions which frame this study:

- What is the nature of collaborative teacher inquiry that has engaged teachers in BCTF Research projects?
- How valuable is teacher inquiry in supporting teachers' learning and professional development?
- How does collaborative inquiry move teachers into more public space, and why might that have utility for teachers and for the systems in which they work? Does this connect to notions of good teaching and good education systems?

Chapter 2 reviews literature in four areas, all of which connect to or impact the forms of teacher inquiry considered in this study. The four areas are:

- Forms of teacher professional development, with an extended focus on teacher inquiry/Action Research
- Networks and collaborations in education and business
- Good teaching and good schools; 'public' and private' space in schools and society, and the connections of these areas to teacher inquiry and professional development
- Teacher unions' approaches to teacher inquiry and professional development

Chapter 3 describes the research methods used. These include document retrieval and analysis covering the four inquiry approaches described in Chapter 3, for the period 1992-2002. Data collection between 2002 and 2006 included observations, video material of classes and meetings, field notes, documents, e-mails and interview transcripts. Focus Group data collected and analyzed in 2006 is also included.

Chapter 4 provides data and analysis of four BCTF Research projects conducted between 1992 and 2002. From these data it became possible to articulate some key components of teacher inquiry and to establish 2002 as one benchmark by articulating these components.
These key components allow for explicit statements which answer the first of three questions which this study aimed to answer: “What is the nature of collaborative teacher inquiry that has engaged teachers in BCTF Research projects?”

Chapter 5 approaches the question: “What is the nature of teacher inquiry developed in the Multiliteracies project conducted between 2002 and 2006?” Data collected in this period are analyzed and showed that this inquiry project had moved beyond the benchmark established in 2002, with new learning about inquiry processes (e.g. the move from private to public space and the importance of conversation in inquiry approaches).

Chapter 6 documents focus group data collection in 2006. One focus group consisted of teachers who had participated in the Multiliteracies project, while a second involved teachers in a parallel inquiry project, ‘Teaching to Diversity’. This group was included to consider whether two concurrently-operating, but unconnected, inquiry group participants may have had similar or different perspectives on teacher inquiry. Both groups responded to the second and third questions which formed the basis for this study:

2. How valuable is teacher inquiry in supporting teachers’ learning and professional development?

3. How does collaborative inquiry move teachers into more public space, and why might that have utility for teachers and for the systems in which they work? Does this connect to notions of good teaching and good education systems?

By posing these questions the study explored the implications for a teacher union, or for any organization interested in considering its support for teacher inquiry, which might be generated from responses.
Chapter 7 connects the threads of data, collected between 1992 and 2006, with the four areas of literature in order to answer the three central research questions, and to consider the implications for teacher unions, school districts, or other organizations with interest in considering the value of teacher inquiry as a form of professional development.

1.4 Limitations to the research

There are two limitations to the research. The first is that of my personal involvement in all the projects being considered in this study, which may increase the perception of bias, and increase the possibility of selective data collection. The intent is that any personal bias is balanced by those data collected from other participants in inquiry processes at all stages of data collection. The second limit is the absence of data from those working at senior levels in school districts and teacher unions. If the research focuses on implications for school districts and teacher unions, one might expect that data should be included from those working at decision-making levels in such organizations. However, the omission is deliberate. Any increased understanding of teacher inquiry concepts and contexts from this research is new and tentative. Discussion around organizational implications beyond my initial analysis may be premature at this stage. If a teacher union or a school district might better understand teacher inquiry through this research, then the stage is set for their consideration of implications. It is that ‘setting of the stage’ as the point in time that this research is intended to reach. Just as the study identified benchmarks of understanding, so it builds a case for a benchmark for commencing organizations’ consideration of collaborative teacher inquiry. The end of this research is a time for them to choose whether or not to use this study in considering their role in supporting teacher inquiry.
CHAPTER II  Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Four areas of literature are considered in this section:

- Forms of teacher professional development, with an extended focus on teacher inquiry/Action Research
- Networks and collaborations in education and business
- Teacher unions' approaches to teacher inquiry and professional development
- Good teaching and good schools; 'public' and 'private' space in schools and society, and the connections of these areas to teacher inquiry and PD

These areas of literature are not all traditionally associated with considerations of collaborative teacher inquiry. Why then do they form part of this study? While they may appear disparate and separate areas of literature, this study will show how each might inform or relate to aspects of collaborative inquiry. The focus on each area is selective rather than exhaustive. The selected authors and texts in each area of the literature are considered because they speak to and inform inquiry approaches. In some cases the literature review more directly links areas of literature such as Action Research and Professional Development than has been common in the past, where each area had to some extent remained discrete. In other cases, new areas of literature are introduced, such as the focus on networking and collaboration in the business literature, because this literature addresses the pragmatics of collaboration largely absent from the education literature. The focus on teacher unions extends the current literature by questioning and analyzing how teacher unions professionally support their members. The literature on good schools, and on public and private space, is a new connection to collaborative teacher inquiry developed in this work, where inquiry means are connected to educative and societal ends, and where notions of judgment within this area of literature are linked to learning processes taking place in inquiry groups. The role of the critical friend, pivotal
to teacher research, may also be a key figure in fostering judgment within inquiry groups. Thus, two previously separate areas of literature might be connected in terms of how judgment is developed. As this has not been previously considered, this connection therefore offers a new contribution to the literature.

2.2 Forms of Teacher Professional Development, With an Extended Focus on Teacher Inquiry/Action Research

The term ‘professional development’ has become ubiquitous. Accepted as a norm and a necessity in professions, there appears minimal critical consideration of what it is and why teachers and others engage in it. There are different models, from the ‘one-off’ district smorgasbord PD day, widely critiqued as inappropriate in some areas of the literature but still common in most school districts, to the ‘on-going’ approaches such as teacher inquiry. Because this study explores teacher inquiry as one form of professional development, it is useful to consider professional development’s meaning, applications and purposes. The literature review considers teacher inquiry as a form of professional development. It also attempts to better understand selective areas of the literature on professional development in order to consider which ideas and approaches might better inform approaches to teacher inquiry. The following section considers adult learning theory, analyses recent literature which stresses collaborative approaches to professional development, and explores context (changing notions of professionalism) and impact (on teachers and on student learning) issues. It also suggests some caution in terms of uncritically accepting packaged and marketed notions such as professional learning communities.
What is professional development?

Teachers' professional development involves adults engaging in learning, so adult learning theory and concepts offers one base for the consideration of professional development. Consideration of the linkage between adult learning and reflective practice, and the components of both, was provided by Rhodes, Stokes and Hampton (2004). They referenced the following four sources: England’s Department for Education and Skills - DfES (2001); Knowles (1980); Kearsley and Shneiderman (1998); and Imel (1998) as a basis for understanding adult learning needs connected to professional learning and reflective practice.

For the Department for Education and Skills (DfES, qtd. in Rhodes et al., 2004, p. 50) in England and Wales, professional learning for teachers includes:

- having time to engage in sustained reflection
- participating in accredited provision through a structured programme of learning
- creating learning opportunities from everyday practice
- developing the ability to identify own learning needs
- developing the ability to identify the learning needs of others
- developing an individual learning plan
- accessing mentoring, coaching and networking
- assimilating professional dialogue and feedback
- planning longer-term career aspirations.

Similarly, Knowles (qtd. in Rhodes et al., 2004, p. 51) stated the following in terms of understanding engagement in adult learning:

- Adults learn best when they are involved in diagnosing, planning, implementing and evaluating their own learning.
- The role of the facilitator is to create and maintain a supportive climate that promotes the conditions necessary for learning to take place.
- Adult learners have a need to be self-directing.
- Readiness for learning increases when there is a specific need to know
Life's reservoir of experience is a primary learning resource and the life experiences of others add enrichment to the learning process.

Adult learners have an inherent need for immediacy of application

Adults respond best to learning when they are internally motivated to learn.

Kearsley and Shneiderman (qtd. in Rhodes et al., 2004, p. 50) stress three components necessary for engagement in learning:

1. Relate. This component emphasizes teamwork and communication. Research on collaborative learning suggests that in the process of collaboration, participants are forced to clarify and verbalize their problem, thereby facilitating solutions. It is also suggested that collaboration increases the motivation of participants to learn. Furthermore, when participants work in teams, they often have the opportunity to work with others from different backgrounds, and this facilitates an understanding of diversity and multiple perspectives.

2. Create. It is suggested that this component makes learning a creative, interesting and purposeful activity. A sense of ownership and control of the project is innate, and fosters problem-based learning.

3. Donate. This component stresses the value of making a useful contribution while learning. The authentic learning context of the project potentially increases participant motivation and satisfaction.

The first of these components (relate) is of particular relevance to teacher inquiry groups, where articulation of ideas is encouraged but often clarified or extended by other participants.

Imel (qtd. in Rhodes et al., 2004, p. 52) also stated six learning principles and implications in a mentoring relationship, which could be considered and applied in almost any collaborative professional development group setting:

- Involve learners in planning and implementing learning activities.
- Draw upon learners' experiences as a resource.
- Cultivate self-direction in learners.
- Create a climate that encourages and supports learning.
- Foster a spirit of collaboration in the learning setting.
- Use small groups.
These authors convey a sense that professional development involves a concept of the adult as active and willing learner in the professional development experience but who is also autonomous and self-directed, building on and respecting prior experience while also building respectful yet challenging collaborative environments. Many of the components described in the literature on adult learning needs and approaches form key components of teacher inquiry – including the spirit of collaboration, effective facilitation, and the assimilation of professional dialogue and feedback. In developing teacher inquiry, therefore, one foundation is adult learning concepts and theory.

This literature reflects a profile of the teacher as learner through professional development, Warfield, Wood and Lehman (2005) link such a profile to students’ learning, arguing that it is necessary for teachers to become autonomous learners if students are to acquire similar capacities:

In order to realize the goal of enabling students to become autonomous learners, it is necessary that teachers also become autonomous learners. Teachers who are self-sustaining and generative see themselves as autonomous decision-makers. That is, they see themselves as capable of using what they know to make decisions about teaching in ways that help children learn rather than relying on others (the textbook, the state tests, teachers of higher grades etc.) to make instructional decisions for them (p. 442).

The above views provide one base in the foundation of the concept of professional development. This links the individual’s approach, or willingness to learn, with processes and approaches to professional development that incorporate effective learning principles and build on individual experience. This connects to and supports Fenstermacher and Richardson’s (2005) inclusion of the ‘willingness of the learner’ as well as the contexts of ‘opportunities to teach and learn’ and the ‘social surround’ supportive of teaching and
learning’, all factors which Fensterrimacher and Richardson believe are required for successful learning to occur.

A second foundation can be found in recent scholarship that both reviews the range of approaches to professional development but also proposes approaches which are essentially collaborative. This includes the work of Randi and Zeichner (2004), Sparks (2002, 2005), and Hargreaves (2000, 2003). Randi and Zeichner and Sparks essentially incorporate most of the key debates and themes linked to teachers’ professional development, while Hargreaves discusses learning communities and contextualizes professional development by articulating historical, evolving, and futuristic phases for teaching and schooling.

Randi and Zeichner (2004) offer a wide-ranging review of the history, current practices, and their preferred directions for the future evolution of teachers’ professional development. They distinguish between “staff” development and “professional” development, arguing that the former often reflected a view of teachers as technicians, undergoing staff development in order to be trained in how to implement programs. Professional development, which, they argue, involved teachers as “active learners in their own professional growth, rather than passive recipients of others’ ideas” (p188). Randi and Zeichner also argue that the notion of staff development implies some form of deficit in the recipients, requiring training, compared with autonomous professionals who extend their education through professional development (2004). Thus staff development in their view has often consisted of training, usually imposed and often linked to lower-order, non-professional work. Burbank and Kauchuk (2003) support Randi and
Zeichner’s view that teachers working as autonomous professionals is a fundamental component of defining teachers’ professional development:

The significance of active teacher autonomy in professional development opportunities cannot be overstated. In one study of teacher development, (Sandholtz, 1999) found that experiences that provide teachers with autonomy, choice, and active participation were critical to effective professional development. Further, in many “collaborative” endeavors, the framing of research questions, data collection measures, and reporting of outcomes are dictated by those outside of classrooms who are often in positions of power (Erickson & Christman, 1996). Not only has teacher professional development been dictated by bureaucrats’ voices within school systems, but also by those outside of schools within the higher education research community (p. 503).

Inherent within this distinction is the element of the individual subject to the control of a hierarchy within an organization or structure. The autonomous professional chooses and is trusted to choose the areas of professional development he or she considers appropriate. There is no overt pressure to attend courses, hence minimal influence of an organization or employer on the individual. In contrast, the person being “developed” may be given a range of options for staff development, or may be more directly steered into a specific training unit. It can be argued that both apply within many educational contexts, sometimes in combination. The school-district professional development day may offer a program from which teachers choose professional development options, or district professional development structures and processes may allow teachers to engage in teacher Action Research or study groups.

In considering preferred directions for teachers’ professional development, Randi and Zeichner draw upon the “teacher knowledge” literature, as well as social cognitive theory, adult learning theory, and what can be learned from the history of staff/professional development. Their preferred directions encapsulate forms of professional development that build individual and system capacity by respecting teacher
knowledge, collaboration with peers to focus on reflections on practice and solving or addressing problems, and developing new knowledge "from the sharing of expertise among members of teacher learning communities". Four examples of such professional development are considered, all of which stress collaborative approaches:

**Teacher Networks**, which generally incorporate facilitative leadership and collaborative learning approaches, with respect for both context-specific and generalized knowledge;

**Teacher Research**, featuring voluntary participation, a balance between respect for and challenge of perspectives, teacher ownership of focus and methods, and taking place over time so that rituals and routines occur to build community;

**Teacher Study Groups**, often school-based, with agendas of common interest to the participants, with possible areas of focus including teaching strategies, content area, or reading/discussing research and

**School-University Collaborations**, including professional development schools and teacher-research projects, perhaps linking theory with practice "in ways that matter to classroom teachers" (p. 217).

These examples could provide a frame for teacher inquiry. If such a wider frame was developed, then teacher inquiry might include teacher research but could be conceptually and methodologically more diverse, incorporating a range of approaches which address teachers' practices or contexts. Randi and Zeichner's four examples of professional development might offer a framework for teacher inquiry. Each of the four areas could be teacher inquiry and each provide a frame for professional development. Thus, Randi and Zeichner are expanding the notion of what constitutes both inquiry and professional development. This is supported by Kincheloe (2003) and Lankshear and Knobel (2004) who have also expanded what were previously narrower frames of teacher inquiry in the literature. It can be argued that concepts of inquiry and concepts of professional development are essentially synonymous in these authors' work. Both are collaborative,
building communities of learners, taking place over time, and focusing on practice or context.

Randi and Zeichner’s analysis of approaches to professional development is extensive, allowing for an understanding of trends and directions in professional development over time. Their preferred directions are non-prescriptive, allowing for adaptation in many contexts. Yet while they advocate for teachers to engage in inquiry of various kinds, Hancock (2001) offers four reasons why many classroom teachers do not engage in research at all:

- the lack of expectation that teachers should research and write about their professional practice
- the demanding nature of teaching which leaves little time and energy for research
- the current lack of professional confidence and marginalization of teachers from government change agendas
- the mismatch between many available research methodologies and teachers’ professional ways of working in classrooms (p. 127).

One needs to consider whether Hancock’s use of the term ‘research’ implies a different approach than may be applied to the term ‘inquiry’, a debate that has somewhat uselessly engaged many academics who debate how ‘rigorous’ each approach might be. But for the purposes of this discussion, the terms ‘research and ‘inquiry’ are assumed to be synonymous.

Sparks (2002) discusses the now ubiquitous phrase “high quality staff development”, stating that such development:

- focuses on deepening teachers’ content knowledge and pedagogical skills
- includes opportunities for practice, research and reflection
- is embedded in educators’ work and takes place during the school day
- is sustained over time
• is founded on a sense of collegiality and collaboration among teachers and between teachers and principals in solving important problems relating to teaching and learning (p. 1-4).

Sparks’ use of the term ‘staff development’ illustrates that there appears to be no consensus in the literature on terminology, as his focus is clearly one of ‘professional’ development than the deficit model espoused in much of the discussion on staff development.

While few teachers would argue with Sparks’ concept and definition of high quality staff development, most would be hard pressed to find the five definitions or conditions existing in their schools and districts. The issue of concern may not be the concept or the definition of “high quality staff development”, but the transfer of concepts into practice, especially in cash-strapped Canadian school districts where money for professional development is limited and rationed. This highlights a fundamental problem with Sparks’ views – that it means all things to all people. With a focus on “Standards” and student achievement, Sparks appeals to those administering systems, and with a focus on collegiality, collaboration, and teacher leadership, he appeals to classroom teachers, and likely to their unions. The focus on “professional learning communities” and the urge to transform current reality may appear naïve to teachers faced with large and often diverse classes and generally fewer resources. Building a professional learning community in schools with adequate books, teachers, and supports may be very different from building in a community that is less resourced and less supported, yet always accountable. Cuban (2003) described such under-resourced and under-supported schools, arguing that limited funding and support limited the opportunities for successful learning.
Sparks' work is idealistic, arguably unrealistic, and yet also valuable in offering a view of professional development that could be supportive and respectful of teachers. In a brief and limited section (p. 5-7), Sparks considers teacher unions as “allies in reform”, yet the areas of collaboration between districts and unions appear to fulfill a management rather than a union agenda. There is no mention of a union role in professional development other than in terms of labour contracts that “emphasize performance-oriented areas such as quality professional development”. Such phrases reflect the apparent need to link all learning to measurable outcomes, surely an oxymoron in what is known about learning, whether in children or adults. But Sparks’ limited discussion of the role of teacher unions also implies that there may be some distance between what teacher unions view of themselves as being professionally-focused, and the view of Sparks who does not appear to view unions in the same light.

A view of the evolving nature of teaching in changing societies was explored by Hargreaves (2000) who outlines four stages of teacher professionalism and professional learning. These stages reflect what Hargreaves believes to be an evolution of professionalism which may have implications for the evolution of professional development. The four stages are:

- **The pre-professional age**, in which teaching was considered technically simple, with common-sense principles and parameters;
- **The age of the autonomous professional**, in which teachers had the right to choose how they taught the students in their charge;
- **The age of the collegial professional**, in which efforts are made to build strong professional cultures of collaboration; and
- **The age of the post-professional or the postmodern professional**, which includes assaults on professionalism by governments initiating change in uncertain times (p. 153).

Hargreaves argues that although the age of the collegial professional is still evolving:
...we are now on the edge of an age of postmodern professionalism where teachers deal with a diverse and complex clientele, in conditions of increasing uncertainty, where many methods of approach are possible, and where more and more social groups have an influence and a say (p. 175).

Hargreaves (2003) contextualizes teacher professional development in a present time in which he considers teaching has become a less attractive profession, with increased teacher disillusion and burnout, and with greater competition from other professions and business for high-caliber teacher candidates. He points to a future of schooling in a knowledge society where, he argues, teachers must build a ‘new professionalism’ where they:

- promote deep cognitive learning
- learn to teach in ways they were not taught
- commit to continuous professional learning
- work and learn in collegial teams
- treat parents as partners in learning
- develop and draw on collective intelligence
- build a capacity for change and risk
- foster trust in processes (p. 24).

Some of these qualities are perennial and hardly discovered by Hargreaves. They are offered here not as a prescription but as an introduction to thinking about the changing world economies and societies, where schools fit within such context, and how teachers teach.

Hargreaves and others stress the notion that preferred forms of professional development are in their view collaborative, involving teachers in discourse, which by involvement in the processes of dialogue, promotes greater learning and sharing. This common-sense notion has been elevated to near-cult status with the notion and promotion of “professional learning communities”, at a time when many school systems have
decimated or reduced the quality of school communities by fiscally-driven change, or by accountability-driven demands.

The components of learning communities were listed by Hargreaves (2003) as:

...collaborative work and discussion among the school's professionals; a strong and consistent focus on teaching and learning within that collaborative work; and gathering assessment and other data to inquire into and evaluate progress and problems over time. Professional learning communities lead to strong and measurable improvement in students' learning. Instead of bringing about 'quick fixes' of superficial change, they create and support sustainable improvements that last over time, because they build the professional skill and capacity to keep the school progressing (p. 127-128).

The school-based nature of professional learning communities was further explored by Eaker, (2002) who argued for significant cultural shifts within schools: from isolation to collaboration; from generic to specific statements about students' learning; from random to specific values and goals. Collaboration, in Eaker's view (as well as in the views of others promoting professional learning communities), appears prescriptive rather than relationship-based, and reads much like the lists generated during the era of "effective schools". The latter is hardly surprising, as many of the professional-learning-community advocates were previously the proponents of effective schools. The requirements of this form of community appear to subsume the individual to the common good but with processes defined, established, and often controlled.

Dufour, Eaker and Dufour (2005) state that the concept of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) has been widely endorsed by (U.S.) National Commissions/Boards as well as by both of the national U.S. teacher unions, the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). But while the concept appears to have wide support, Dufour et al. (2005) identify three challenges that they believe
prevent the concept becoming a reality: developing and applying shared knowledge, sustaining the hard work of change, and transforming school culture. Yet the stating of these challenges implicitly reflects a belief that building community can be achieved through adhering to

the recipe-book approach and stern directions of the Professional Learning Community proponents:

Many schools and districts that proudly proclaim they are professional learning communities have shown little evidence of either understanding the core concepts or implementing the practices of Professional Learning Communities. Educators must develop a deeper, shared knowledge of learning community concepts and practices, and then must demonstrate the discipline to apply those concepts and practices in their own settings if their schools are to be transformed (p. 9).

This kind of lecturing on community-building is not likely to generate wide support among teachers, and the hectoring tone contrasts with the same authors’ encouraging messages of collaboration and mutual support. Such a contrast reflects the problematic dichotomy of the literature on professional learning communities: that the positive messages of collaboration are tempered with prescription and control. Telling teachers to "demonstrate the discipline" implies a controlling view of community that perhaps is not shared among many teachers, who might wish for a more egalitarian form of collegial discourse. To use a medical analogy, Dufour’s work implies that success follows adherence to a prescription – using drugs to achieve a cure, which may not always be appropriate, and may sometimes be wrong. Or the cure may be achieved through other, more holistic approaches without resorting to drugs. Those prescribing the drugs see only one solution, in which, incidentally, some proponents have a financial interest. Yet many people increasingly demand alternatives to drugs mandated by an “expert”, so forcing the prescription may generate rejection or non-compliance. Many educators may not choose
prescriptions generated by others and forced upon them, a situation surely compatible with teachers as professionals. Approaches that offer structures and options that are flexible and adaptable may have better chances of success and sustainability.

In a novel twist on learning communities, McBeath (qtd. in Rhodes et al., 2004) turned the table on governments and their agents which consistently speak of building learning communities while dictating the form and nature of both professional development and learning opportunities. He articulated eight approaches that could be followed by the UK’s Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). These approaches should be pasted on most Ministry of Education walls wherever they may be. Simply replace ‘OfSted’ with the ‘Ministry of Education’ for transferable guidelines, listed below:

If Ofsted were to become a learning organization it would:

- acknowledge the authority and wisdom of teachers
- listen to the greater understanding of its critics
- broaden the scope of its thinking
- be self-evaluating – taking feedback on its own effectiveness from management, teachers and students
- contextualize its findings
- discuss its findings in a reflective, critical and evidence-based way so as to provide a learning experience for the school and for Ofsted
- help lead to capacity building
- help in learning to know what we see rather than seeing what we already know (p. 114).

One solution to the dilemma posed by over-prescriptive approaches to building more genuine than contrived learning communities may be found in Day and Hadfield’s (2004) comments which reject narrow definitions and approaches while articulating notions of teacher empowerment through self-critical but non-prescriptive communities which are built on the will and skill of teachers and others involved in such communities:

Notions of emancipation and empowerment of teachers (Stenhouse, 1983), the recognition of a need to develop a new language for communication between
teachers and academics (Nias, 1991), whilst attractive, depend for their fulfillment upon the willingness, social skills and abilities of participants to create and negotiate contracts, either collectively or individually, which are based on forms of moral responsibility, critical friendship, and the exercise of trust (p. 584).

Similarly, Sergiovanni (1996) defined communities of learners as “collections of individuals who are bonded together by natural will and who are bound to a set of shared ideas and ideals” (p. 48).

In terms of impact, some strands of the literature have embraced narrow views of professional development that devalue teaching as a profession. In the USA, the focus of professional development and its link to student learning has been narrowed in efforts to link teachers’ professional development with narrowly-defined student achievement measured in standardized tests. (Schacter & Thum, 2005). In other situations, professional development may be connected to the implementation of programs mandated for universal use within districts. Both of these devalue teachers’ professional autonomy as they make professional development mandated rather than chosen by teachers, and often limit the focus and content in ways that discourage reflection, discourse and adaptation of approaches. This reflects the notion that staff development should be used to promote and meet organizational goals, where the individual teacher is subsumed to a top-down mandated approach to both teaching and staff development.

Yet the case has also been made for a much wider consideration of impact of professional development beyond a narrow link to student learning measured by test scores. In arguing for a wider definition of impact of professional development (i.e. not only linked to students’ gains but on the needs of teachers), Rhodes et al. (2004) state:
Impact should not, however, be concerned solely with quantifiable data of learning gains for learners but also take into account teachers’ own personal, academic and professional needs. Given that teachers will have unique patterns of individual professional learning, Burchell, Dyson and Rees (2000) argue that there are many different ways to demonstrate impact which include hard tangible outcomes, and also affective and motivational outcomes rooted in personal and professional values (p. 6).

The notion of ‘value’ articulated by Rhodes et al., is central to this research. ‘Value’ includes but extends beyond utility. Utility suggests pragmatic worth, while value is linked to the ‘personal and professional’ senses of worth. This may include an increased sense of professionalism, a greater pride and interest in teaching, improved feelings of self-worth through participation in professional development which respects the worth of the individual as a professional with time and support.

Teachers’ professional autonomy, another contested area in an era of mandates and system conformity, need not be articulated as a concept where teachers do whatever they like, but might instead reflect the view proposed by Eagleton (2003):

(Professional) autonomy should not be taken to mean teachers exercising professional judgment in isolation from their peers, but rather that they develop their professional learning through systematic investigation, rather than by fiat (p. 332).

Autonomy in this view is promoted by collaborative teacher inquiry, which essentially checks potential excesses of teacher autonomy. The notion is of interest in a system grappling with the dilemma of centralized change and local decision-making. Eagleton suggests that collaborative inquiry builds discourse. This builds autonomy within community, the community’s role being to provide the checks and balances of peers’ opinions, so that autonomy is possible but that ideas can and should be challenged and extended. This notion also links to the building of judgment through the safe space of inquiry groups (Coulter, 2002).
Simons (1999) articulated two kinds of impact of professional development on teachers: 'near' and 'far' transfer. 'Near transfer' involves a close relationship between the professional development experience and the application of whatever has been the focus of the professional development session. Many new and inexperienced teachers find the greatest utility in approaches that can be directly and immediately utilized in the classroom – a new curriculum unit, an adapted material, a lesson plan. The notion of 'far transfer' implies a greater distance between the professional development experience and any application. "Far" transfer may be of greater utility to experienced teachers who do not need lesson plans or curriculum units but who may wish to discuss or reflect on more general issues – teaching styles, groups of learners facing difficulties with current approaches, the nature of collaboration with peers. Near transfer supports dealing with immediate difficulties, while far transfer is linked to greater professional growth, and is therefore of more utility over a teacher's career than the short-term need for 'something that works with my class tomorrow'.

The debate on professional/staff development therefore is conceptual (what is it, and who gets to choose?), organizational (where and how does it fit in current educational structures?), contextual (how will it fit in changing societies and changing school systems?), and linked to large-scale systemic reform (how does it make reform X effective?). In recent years the debate has stirred almost evangelical overtones. The authors Sparks (2002) and Randi and Zeichner (2004), herald "new visions" for professional development, prefixed with terms such as "powerful" or "compelling", descriptors usually viewed with some suspicion by practitioners in schools who have seen
many powerful and compelling visions come and go, likely because they were powerful and compelling to their promoters rather than to teachers in schools. Yet the disparity between the ideal and the reality of professional development is disturbing. It appears highly problematic for Sparks and others to stubbornly propose an ideal that many school districts and governments ignore while failing to either challenge those districts and governments or find approaches that may have a better chance of survival and replication. There are many sources of information about ideal notions of professional development, even if the ideal seems close to fantasy for many teachers. Yet there is a strong case that teachers’ professional development can and should meet teachers’ needs, broadly defined, without direct links to measurable student outcomes but very closely connected to student learning. The notion of professional development which is collaborative is strong and consistent, even if taken to prescriptive extremes by the Dufour afficionados of professional learning communities.

Many of the authors discussed here are in different ways idealistic pragmatists who are balancing the conceptual, contextual and systemic thinking and pressures to offer ideas and frameworks for evolving rather than revolutionary professional development. They tend not to offer prescriptive solutions but rather broader frameworks within which professional development might occur which respects but also offers challenges to teacher professionalism while also supporting improved student learning. But they also offer explicit stances or preferences that are based on analysis of the literature as well as their own experiences. What they all share is the firm belief that professional development is not an isolated or a “one-off” activity – that teachers meeting for
professional development purposes gain knowledge and understanding over time, and not in single sessions or single days.

Conclusion

There is much to learn in the literature on professional development. The literature on how adults learn forms a useful basis for considering learning in professional development activities. Because there is a consensus in much of the literature that on-going, sustained professional development is preferable to ‘one-off’ sessions, it appears logical to adopt this frame as an approach. Beyond that, one must make a decision to adopt or adapt the arguments and evidence presented in the literature. After adopting some principles of adult learning, and a frame of on-going professional development, I would argue for adaptation of approaches from the literature, blending approaches and concepts to match context and needs. As examples, the notion of a professional learning community might be developed without the baggage and merchandise associated with certain marketers of an appropriated idea. There are authors who are less prescriptive and who, I would argue, provide more useful analysis of professional development concepts for teacher inquiry groups. This allows inquiry groups to adopt differing frameworks and approaches to meet their needs during the inquiry process, to consider their students’ learning, and the context in which they work. Thus, the work of Randi and Zeichner (2004) offers ideas and rationales for collaborative inquiry without prescribing the exact nature of such inquiry. One major weakness in some of the professional development literature is in its articulation of unrealistic conditions (e.g. time within the school day for professional development). These conditions are absent from most school districts. By providing such unrealistic conditions as a contextual frame devalues some of this professional development work within the frame.
I argued above that many authors on professional development are pragmatic idealists. Analysis of their work might assume pragmatism and idealism as useful guides. How useful is the work, and how does it guide and inform teacher inquiry, which assumes one can make changes on a continuum, from one’s own practice, to, if you are John Elliott (2005), the world?

2.3 Action Research as a Form of Teacher Inquiry and Professional Development

Rationale for considering this area of literature

Action Research is integral to the concept of teacher inquiry, because it utilizes reflective and collaborative approaches, and because its influence over many forms of teacher inquiry is significant. There is much to learn and to build on in the Action Research literature. Yet there are some questions about Action Research, particularly whether its proponents have become somewhat isolated and insular over time, and this will be explored in this review. This section of the literature review will consider whether the Action Research literature has evolved in ways that can support current models of teacher inquiry. Regardless of this analysis, there is a huge debt owing to those who have articulated Action Research concepts in the last 60 years simply because they have built a foundation for diverse applications of teacher inquiry. While homage is due, questions will be posed and challenges offered in this analysis of the Action Research literature:

There are diverse types of Action Research, varying across several dimensions; in whether carried out solely by practitioners or involving external agents; in how far it is pursued individually or collectively; in whether it is concerned with local and specific problems or with bringing about wider educational or social change; in which method it favours; in what methodological or theoretical stances it draws on, for instance, positivism, pragmatism, interpretivism, critical theory or postmodernism. However, abstracting from this diversity, the core feature of Action Research seems to be that there should be an intimate relationship between research and some form of practical or political activity – such that the focus of the inquiry arises out of, and its results feed back into, the activity concerned (Hammersley, 2004, p. 165).
Any consideration of teacher inquiry is incomplete without a focus on Action Research, which is practitioner-oriented and collaborative in nature. The evolution of Action Research has been widely covered (Hollingsworth, 1997; McTaggart, 1997). Rather than retread this well-worn and possibly threadbare carpet, six claims about the evolution of Action Research will be made here, based on a review of the Action Research literature. I will argue that what connects these six claims are issues of knowledge and power. In some cases, there exists a power differential between school-based teachers and academics, with some tendency to place academic knowledge above practitioners’ knowledge, and to publish in spaces that tend not to attract many practitioners either as readers or as contributors. Examining Action Research necessitates looking at how teachers’ approaches to teaching are often dominated in schools by state mandates, and Action Research can be used as a form of resistance, and as a way of challenging centralized mandates. In some ways the ‘critical friend’ in Action Research can support teachers in what might be daunting struggles to challenge context or focus on issues of social justice (Weriss & Fine, 2004). Such a friend might also support teachers going public with their research, as Action Researchers both check their claims in wider spheres but also challenge existing power structures with alternative knowledge generated from their research. These are some examples of how knowledge and power intersect and connect the six claims below:

i. While educational Action Research has evolved internationally since the 1940s, and has been championed by individual academics and in large-scale projects, the voices of teachers have been largely absent from the literature.

Most researchers identify Kurt Lewin (1946) as the person naming and framing Action Research. But Noffke (1997) and McNiff and Whitehead (2006) make a case for John Collier having first developed Action Research in his work as Commissioner of Indian
Affairs in the USA between 1933 and 1945. Since then, a resilient and persistent group of academics have supported Action Research. Schon's (1987) focus on reflective practice has been influential.

In the UK, Stenhouse (1975, 1983) was widely credited with supporting teacher participation in inquiry during the Humanities project (1967-72). Elliott (1978) discussed the nature of Action Research in schools and, in reviewing the evolution of Action Research in the UK, (1997), considered it to occur in cycles, sometimes officially sanctioned and sometimes lost in managerial approaches to education. McNiff (1993) and Whitehead (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006) have been long-standing UK proponents of Action Research. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), and McTaggart (1991) wrote extensively about Action Research in Australia, where large-scale Action Research projects included the Participation and Equity program in the 1980s, and the more recent Priority Action Schools program (PASP). Zeichner (2004), Noffke (1997), Hollingsworth (1997), Lytle and Cochran-Smith (1993, 1998) form a US contingent of Action Research proponents and analysts, where fewer large-scale projects appear to have occurred, but where a consistent and tenacious group of academics have engaged in and supported many school-based Action Researchers in their inquiry approaches. Connelly and Clandinin (1990, 1994), and Clarke and Erickson (2003), reflect a Canadian interest in Action Research. Most of the larger-scale projects were temporary and arguably unsuccessful in establishing and sustaining Action Research systemically, yet most of these initiatives are still championed by most of the authors listed above, whose Action Research focus and longevity has proven more durable than the projects listed here.
While Action Research has its supporters, Cochran-Smith (2005) argues that more negative views exist in both academic and policy-making environments and that the proponents of such views wield considerable power and influence:

At the same time that self-study and other forms of practitioner inquiry are burgeoning, there is also heavy criticism and sometimes dismissal of this work by the larger research community and by policy-makers (p. 226).

The bulk of the Action Research literature is produced by academics, some of whom (Kemmis, 2005) critique yet perpetuate the academic role and function. The tension is under-explored in the literature, yet reflects a curious paradox: teacher Action Research is essentially a tool for teachers to change and improve practice, whether in implementation of change or by considering wider social issues and social change. It is practice-oriented, yet those who conduct the research have limited roles in dissemination, minimal authorship in journals, and low profiles in the academic literature which rarely references non-academic Action Researchers, and which essentially is dominated by an academic discourse which excludes many practitioners who work in elementary and secondary schools.

Why is it so difficult to find non-academic teacher voices in the Action Research literature? It may in part be the result of peer-reviewed journals’ limited accessibility to most teacher authors unless they adopt an academic style, language and tone, thereby exercising a form of power to exclude teachers. The term ‘peer’ may also be misleading with its appearance of promoting an egalitarian meritocracy. ‘Peers’ is reserved for those who have entered the academy or have fully accepted its form of discourse. The term and arguably the practice of peer reviewing actually excludes many teachers who are not considered peers, and whose work may not be approved by or included in peer reviewed
journals. Thus, a hierarchy may have developed within the Action Research movement, with academics controlling publication outlets, while professing to promote egalitarian communities of Action Researchers. It could be argued that some academics have essentially colonized Action Research and created hierarchies and power differentials in which they write about and sometimes facilitate Action Research, while practitioners play a secondary and possibly subservient role. Evidence for this can be found in almost any collection of Action Research papers, where there is a dearth of teacher authors, and when they do publish, it is often using the academic language and discourse necessary to gain access to academic journals.

Action Research authors who are teachers have found publication spaces on a range of web sites sponsored by universities, teacher unions or school districts. But the status of such sites is low, with few references to teachers' writing on the web by academics and minimal effort by academics to access non-traditional sources of information such as web sites. There are also appear to be few references to teachers' writing in university courses teaching Action Research, and few teacher-written papers used as required text readings in such courses.

For a movement inextricably linked to Social Justice, such hierarchies are troubling reminders of how shallow the focus on justice may be, with (university) class and privilege pervasive, and inequalities between those who work in schools and those in universities reflected in time for reflection, and in terms of access to funding. As one example, SSHRC funding in Canada can pay for graduate student time in a university but not for teachers' time in schools. In such an example, the power differential is
institutionalized by the federal government, and those academic who fight for social justice through Action Research apparently see little need to challenge this form of exclusion which reinforces power differentials.

ii. **Increased centralized control of education systems has reduced the sanctioned level of Action Research approaches for teachers, because Action Research potentially counters and challenges centralized and technocratic control of education systems.**

Evidence from the UK (Peters, 2005), the USA (Kincheloe, 2003), Australia (Groundwater-Smith, 2005) suggests that in recent years states, provinces, or central national governments have taken steps to more closely regulate and control education systems, often with references to market-orientations, rigid testing processes and school success measured in tests and reflected in league tables. Groundwater-Smith (2005) argues that approaches which reduce teachers’ autonomy and decision-making, making reflection on practice exemplified in Action Research less likely and less encouraged than compliance with directives and mandates:

> The narrowing and changing nature of professional decision-making space is not the result of some capricious set of circumstances, but directly relates to the development of a globally-held view that market-driven economies are winning economies and the sooner they are supported by competitive education systems the better (p. 333).

> Quality assurance, league tables, the closure of failing enterprises leave less space for the emancipatory possibilities that were imagined 20 years ago (Groundwater-Smith, 2005, p. 334).

Smith and Rowley (2005) argues that ‘reform’ movements in education have shifted in recent years, away from site-based systems and towards Standards and Accountability:

> During the past decade or so, popular rhetoric has shifted away from site-based management and participatory governance as the centerpiece of school reform strategies as accountability and standards-based reform have become the reform mantra of policy makers at all levels of government (p. 126).
Kincheloe argued that the Standards approach so widely adopted in the USA has
‘subverted the possibility’ of teachers researching their own practice:

Technical standards demand that teachers in the same subjects and grade levels
cover the same content, assign the same importance to the content they cover, and
evaluate it in the same way (Marzano & Kendall, 1999). Such standardization
ignores the profound differences between diverse schools, school settings, student
needs, and so on. As teacher-author Susan Ohanian (1999) puts it: ‘a one-size-fits-
all curriculum ends up fitting nobody’ (p. 43). As it fits nobody, such an
educational arrangement subverts the possibility that teacher professionals might
research school atmospheres, the communities surrounding schools, student
needs, the disciplinary and counter-disciplinary knowledges constituting the
curriculum, and the administrative modus operandi of both their districts and their
schools. Informed by these understandings, such teachers as researchers could
better develop and implement a curriculum connected to the vicissitudes and
exigencies of their unique situations (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 4-5).

Centralized government or school district control includes mandating curriculum and in
some cases delivery systems. The teacher in such systems is expected to deliver what is
mandated, so there is little need of reflection, at least in the view of governments that
impose rigid mandated approaches. Mandating reflects power – the power to control
approaches to teaching and learning. Action Research can challenge such approaches
because it creates the possibility that teachers will find that which is mandated
inappropriate to their students’ needs, and to the particular situation in their classrooms.

Findings of this kind may lead to adaptation or change responsive to students’ needs but
contradictory to the general mandate, a highly undesirable outcome for central
governments forcing compliance with mandated approaches. But Action Researchers
only challenge mandates when they go public, when they present or share their findings
in a public space where their challenge can be considered and its merits challenged. Thus
the notion of moving into more public space is crucial to the idea of Action Research
challenging centralized orthodoxies and mandates.
Elliott (2005), reflecting on Action Research in the UK, argued that teachers have and will continue to struggle against controls that reduce autonomy, and limit reflection and peer discourse:

The space for the exercise of such (teacher) agency will not come simply as a gift from government. It will be wrought out of a political struggle, by teachers and others within society, to create the material conditions for a free, open and democratically constructed practical discourse to emerge as a context for professional action (p. 363).

Similarly, Carr and Kemmis (2005) argued that:

...the assumption that teachers should exercise autonomous professional judgment has been profoundly undermined, first by the accountability movement of the 1980s and, secondly, by the massive re-regulation and hyper-rationalization of schooling in the 1990s (p. 350).

One explanation for the limited life-span of system-sanctioned Action Research projects may be that governments understood the nature of the challenge from teacher inquiry/Action Research and took steps to remove such challenges. Yet some state-sanctioned projects such as the Australian Priority Action Schools Program (PASP) suggests a more benevolent and empowering use of state authority:

While they had some additional resources, they also had permission, encouragement and support to explore how they might do things differently, to try new ideas in practice, to learn from carefully-observed experience, to reflect and change direction in the light of what they had learned. In effect, their collective professional decision-making space had been greatly enhanced (Groundwater-Smith, p. 341).

While some state-sanctioned programs and mandates may have limited Action Research, the principles of collaboration and reflection leading to action and change have a resilience that cannot be fully thwarted by centralized and controlling systems. This may reflect the limited success of centralized control to fully control every aspect of teachers' work, or it may be an indication that some teachers may comply with centralized mandates while others may resist.
Indeed, the literature from England and the USA suggests a lively dichotomy between those who comply with state mandates and those who promote and practice some form of reflective inquiry in order to challenge them. One lesson to be learned from this literature is that even in the most directive and controlled systems, some teachers and academics have found ways to counter the dominant and centralized control of education and keep the flame of teacher inquiry alive. Power may be used to thwart Action Research, but it has never fully destroyed it. Perhaps this is because the knowledge generated in Action Research projects cannot be controlled or eliminated. This claim is made in part because of my experience, and from the sheer volume of Action Research literature, that both reflect teachers' determination to reflect on their practice and to improve it using Action Research as an approach.

iii. Tensions and dichotomies occur in Action Research, in particular between researchers with an interest in social change and those looking to improve their teaching and schools without an explicit focus on social change.

Groundwater-Smith (2005) argues that “Action Research has been popularized and appropriated as an implementation tool instead of as a social change method with far-reaching implications” (p. 335).

Groundwater-Smith's assumption is that Action Research must involve social change, an assumption not shared by many practitioners and some academics. The claim that Action Research could be appropriated reflects a somewhat arrogant assumption implying ownership, and attempts to identify a hierarchy within the Action Research movement, exemplified in the perennial spat between John Elliott and Stephen Kemmis, discussed below.
There are different threads of Action Research, from those which lead to minor adjustments of pedagogy, or implementation of an approach, to the sort of Action Research preferred by many academics, which involves issues of race, class, gender, and which theoretically leads to some form of awareness and possible empowerment of the Action Researcher, and towards a more equitable world. The fantasies of Action Research academics in believing that equity in society might be generated through Action Research appear long-standing if not permanent. Such fantasies primarily assume that social change will occur through Action Research. Yet there is no evidence that Action Research has impacted any major area of social change since its inception some 60 years ago, surely something of a problem for those arguing for a primary focus on its use to promote such change. The focus on social change has therefore become a creed of comfort for some academics. Yet it could be argued that such a focus has constrained the capacity of Action Research by constantly proposing an unlikely nirvana of social change. This may have alienated some school-based practitioners who may not have luxury of academic discourse, or of promoting societal change, but who seek reflective and collaborative approaches to solving or progressing with more mundane issues affecting their students’ learning and their teaching.

However, the notion that Action Research is grounded in social change permeates much of the literature, and has merit. Reflective practice cannot ignore context, so that a teacher’s reflection on practice may includes a consideration of the context of children’s lives, and the communities in which they live. Reflecting on practice therefore means reflecting on the context in which practice takes place, which may involve issues of race, class and gender. It may involve consideration of power and control in education.
systems, so that reflective practice may open a Pandora's box of issues both for the reflective practitioner, and for the system in which she or he teaches or works. Action Research generates knowledge of the particular in school settings to create forms of knowledge that can challenge contexts promulgating injustice. Yet there are also examples of Action Research where such considerations do not occur, where teachers reflect on practice without considerations of wider context. Or they may be encouraged by some educational administrators or managers to reflect in a way that deliberately excludes issues such as race, or the possibility of system change. This tension has created both rifts and an identification of hierarchy, perhaps best exemplified by John Elliott's (2005) reflections on the 1983 publication of Carr and Kemmis's 'Becoming Critical':

The publication of 'Becoming Critical' was an emotional experience for me. It hierarchalised Action Research in terms of Habermas's categories of 'knowledge constitutive interests', i.e. 'the technical', 'the practical' and 'the emancipatory'.... The message was that the kind of collaborative Action Research I was undertaking with teachers in the UK was in need of redemption (p. 365).

Elliott's reflections critique the preferred hierarchy of approaches espoused by many Action Research academics, as well as including his assertion that Kemmis essentially misinterprets Habermas's work. Within the preferred hierarchy critiqued by Elliott, emancipation is clearly at the top as a preferred approach, with the practical and the technical poor second cousins, if not bastard offspring. Such hierarchical views may alienate many teachers who consider their work to be educative rather than emancipatory or primarily connected with social justice. Issues such as this reflect differing views of what constitutes valid knowledge among educators, and suggests a struggle for control of the Action Research agenda.
It is difficult to argue that in some cases, for example when looking at education for poor and disadvantaged students, the focus on social justice should not be a priority. How can an educator consider ‘practice’ while ignoring poverty and deprivation, or perhaps the lack of resources allocated in some situations to high poverty schools? The tension between those stressing emancipation, and those with a more ‘practical’ focus remains, and is unresolved in much of the literature. However, one possible way to address this tension is explored later in this literature review, with the focus on the work of Fenstermacher and Richardson (2005). In their work, the question of what constitutes ‘good’ education includes a consideration of school, home and societal contexts, thereby opening the gate for a ‘dual’ approach to Action Research examining both individual practice and schooling contexts.

iv. There is a continued debate over methods and approaches to Action Research, but there has been a shift from focus on the Action Research ‘cycle’ towards more general principles rather than explicit methods.

Many articles in the Action Research literature have stressed the cycle of problem identification, data collection, reflection or analysis, then action to change practice. The more recent literature has to some extent steered away from the specifics of the cycle to a more general exposition of principles or approaches, some of which may widen the parameters of what may be considered as Action Research.

Within this later literature, Elliott (2005) suggested that “Action Research implies no specific methods of inquiry” (p. 370), and offered four ‘principles of procedure’ for undertaking Action Research which he believed was exemplified in his projects which:

- established conditions of data gathering that do not require teachers to separate their thinking about educational processes from a consideration of their aims
- acknowledged the complexity and particularity of teachers’ classrooms
• engaged teachers in a form of collaborative inquiry that was open to other participants, such as professional researchers
• provided opportunities for sharing and discussing classroom data (p. 369).

Kincheloe (2003) also aims to ‘avoid a slick step-by-step prescription of quick and easy methods of initiating critical teacher research’, instead offering seven ‘tentative guidelines for teachers interested in incorporating critical Action Research into their classrooms’:

• Constructing a system of meaning. (defined as a source of authority, eg. critical/feminist theory)
• Understanding dominant research methods and their effects, in order to see what is ignored by these approaches
• Selecting what to study - guided by emancipatory system of meaning and rejection of instrumentally rational research, researchers begin to see schools and classrooms from unique angles: ‘this ability to see familiar settings from the outside looking in
• Acquiring a variety of research strategies, across range of qualitative inquiry approaches
• Making sense of the information collected - uncovering relationships in classrooms, school, community, posing questions which can change the focus of one’s professional life
• Gaining awareness of the tacit theories and assumptions which guide practice. Critical Action Researchers turn their inquiry on themselves, seeking to uncover the forces that construct their own consciousnesses
• Viewing teaching as an emancipatory, praxis-based act. Critical Action Research is incompatible with a view of teaching as a technical act of information delivery. The term ‘praxis-based’ signifies this incompatibility in its concern with informed practice (p. 138-140).

Lankshear and Knobel (2004) suggested a wider definition of both teacher researchers and the areas of focus for their inquiry:

We identify teacher researchers as ‘classroom practitioners at any level, from preschool to tertiary, who are involved individually or collaboratively in self-motivated and self-directed systematic and informed inquiry undertaken with a view to enhancing their vocation as professional educators’. The idea of enhancing one’s vocation as a professional educator covers ‘internal’ aspects like achieving greater personal satisfaction and a heightened sense of worth, purpose, direction and fulfillment, as well as ‘external aspects like improving the effectiveness of one’s teaching practice in significant areas (p. 9).
Lankshear and Knobel reinforce the notion of value accruing to the Action Researcher. With their statement of 'internal values' they argue that values are enhancing the participants self-worth and sense of professionalism, and that such internal values are of merit in themselves while also accepting the utility of Action Research to improve practice. Thus utility is a part of the overall value of Action Research, but Action Research is not just a utilitarian approach to practical improvements but also connected to values of self-worth and professionalism.

These approaches suggest a shift away from one method, approach or definition – including the classic Action Research spiral of problem identification, data collection, reflection and action – towards a more open framework which incorporates general principles, some methods, ‘sense-making’ of the immediate practice, and awareness of contexts which may include issues of race, class, gender, or poverty. In some ways, the narrower methods of an earlier literature have become subsumed to the wider approaches being proposed in the newer literature, so that Action Research is more akin to a philosophy of personal, school and societal inquiry in which the self and the system come under scrutiny and both are or can be equally challenged. These approaches also have a common view that Action Research is about developing forms of knowledge through the process of reflection, whatever the method, and that such knowledge might both empower those who engage in Action Research, and potentially enable them to challenge practices generated by standardized mandates, or to address issues of social oppression.

One sophisticated example of the blending of philosophy and methods can be found in the work of Hyland and Noffke (2005) who overtly state their anti-oppression stance
while building a framework for inquiry which respects participants and communities by building components into inquiry-based courses which support key understandings, including ‘deconstructing experiences through discussions and critical reflection’ (p. 378). Their approach provokes on-going questioning and debate rather than providing limited answers, builds capacity for teachers in diverse classrooms, and aims for social justice. Hyland and Noffke introduce such concepts without attempting to force teacher compliance into their frame or philosophy, engaging teachers rather than coercing them. Tensions and dichotomies over methods therefore occur in the Action Research literature which reflects a range of approaches to inquiry. Although some tensions may occasionally strain relationships, for an outside researcher considering the literature on Action Research, they are positive in that they provide opportunities for discussion about differences in approach and philosophy in Action Research.

v. The notion of the ‘critical friend’ bridging ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ roles, has endured throughout the history of Action Research, and could evolve into a role moving reflective inquiry into more public space.

One relative constant in the methods and approaches area of the literature on Action Research is the notion of the ‘critical friend’. Such a person assumes a role combining the camaraderie of collaboration with the capacity to probe and to challenge participants, sometimes out of their comfort zone, so that individuals and groups evade complacency in their inquiry:

While there is a notion of friendship in the role of teacher as critical friend, collaborator and peer scrutineer, there is also a notion of challenge and confrontation for the purposes of development. Critical friendships and other relationships will involve disclosure and feedback. Talk is one of the main ways of conducting these critical friendships, peer scrutiny sessions and collaborations. In addition, being mindful of the developing use of new technologies, e-mail, videoconferencing, websites and chatrooms, for example, will all play a large part in future exchanges and dialogues (Campbell, McNamara and Gilroy, 2004, p. 107).
The notion of 'critical friend' to some extent bridges the 'insider-outsider' issue, where 'insiders', usually teachers, may offer or receive challenges to their findings by 'outsiders' in districts or governments, often holding status and in positions of power. The critical friend is physically inside the Action Research group but sufficiently outside the group by reason of different organizational affiliation, role or location in everyday work to challenge and extend individual and group thinking. So, for instance, an Action Researcher finding adherence to 'Standards' problematic, may find an opportunity to engage the proponents of Standards in vigorous and challenging debate, and may engage with the critical friend as a way of developing a case based on evidence from his or her research. By doing this both critical friend and Action Researcher are taking steps to move into more public space, offering a challenge within safer limits than might be provided in a completely public forum.

Teachers' judgment in Action Research projects may be developed both by their experience, by collaborative reflection, and by the actions and support of a critical friend. Action Research can be productive and powerful professional development by making the discourse more public as well as more challenging. The critical friend can play an important role in developing the Action Researcher's 'inner judgment', and by developing this can prepare the researcher for the more public space beyond the research group. If one considers the following comments by Dadds (2001), it is possible to see connections between the development of the practitioner's judgment and voice, and the potential for the critical friend to play a pivotal and supporting role:

These conditions of dominant outside expertise, backed by structures of power, make it more difficult to foster good quality professional development that generates wise judgment and actions from the inside, especially when this involves radical insider critique of the outsider, centralist agenda. Yet how unwise
it would be to leave uncultivated, unrecognized and unused, the perspectives of those who work closest to children on a daily basis.... But at the centre of professional development there has to be the nurturing of inner wisdom and critical judgment about what can be provided for each child in each situation. This is the practitioners's responsibility. This is why the inner voice must be cultivated; personal theories must be evolved, belief in and responsibility for the professional self seen as crucial and indispensable. Outsider’s theories can be drawn upon, used, judged, engaged. But they can only ever be supportive resources in the development of this informed and sensitive inner judgment (p. 52-53).

By building such judgment, critical friends could play a role in clarifying whether anticipated changes in practice require policy change to accompany the individual practitioner’s change, and make policy responsive to practice rather than the reverse, which appears more of a norm in most education systems. The critical friend might facilitate the discussion and focus thinking on change, by an individual teacher, or a group of teachers; by a school, a school district or a government. It could be argued that if systemic or social change is to occur, it will not occur because academics argue for it in peer-reviewed journals but by strategic pressure to challenge orthodoxies and to demonstrate why change is necessary. Such pressure could be applied by Action Research practitioners with evidence from their research and with the support of critical friends. The inner judgment referred to by Dadds need not be directed purely at personal practice but could work for systemic and social change, if strategically applied.

In this way, the role of the critical friend is extended from facilitation to supporting dissemination knowledge mobilization, which might result in challenges to policy by moving inquiry, and the results of inquiry, into more public spaces, addressed in more detail later in this review. This requires accepting that the action involved may not simply be the action of the reflective practitioner, though it could be. It suggests that there is an explicit effort to engage others in considering the merits of the inquiry and being open to
challenge from those who participate in this more public space. Take two hypothetical examples. In the first a group engaged in Action Research might share their findings with other teachers or with parents, engaging in discussion about their approaches and the changes they are implementing, thereby encouraging questioning and challenges to their claims. In a second scenario, a group may have found that some contexts were influencing their capacity to develop good learning experiences for students. Perhaps a district initiative did not work well for their class, or perhaps too many hungry children appeared at school every day. Their dissemination and mobilization activities, then, might be supported and facilitated by the critical friend who considers not only the processes of data collection and analysis, but also how to support teachers going into public forums to articulate a case for systemic change.

It could be argued that in accepting and promoting the role of critical friend, there may exist a tacit assumption of some superior knowledge in the critical friend than exists in the inquiry participants. It could also be argued that the critical friend, especially if an academic, might potentially exercise power and control over the inquiry group. Both of these might be true, but both can be addressed through challenges to the critical friend from inquiry group participants, so they do not perpetuate the idea that they are the passive recipients of critique. This suggests that it may be possible and preferable to share the role of critical friend among participants rather than it being the sole prerogative of the one person, likely the academic. The key point is that issues of knowledge and power are never far away, but can be addressed within inquiry groups, whose members might access other literatures on distributed leadership, discussed in more detail in the section on networks and collaborations, below.
The utility of the literature on the critical friend is that it offers a base from which to consider the role while also considering extending the role to moving the group into more public space and to developing strategic challenges. Considering the literature on networking and collaboration, there might be a case for developing a network of critical friends drawn across organizational boundaries, and including teacher union, school district and university personnel. Such networks might then create a space for facilitators and critical friends to consider their current and potential roles, and reach across organizational boundaries to strengthen the credibility of challenges to mandates or system orthodoxies.

vi. The literature on Action Research has become insular over time, and needs to connect more with other strands of literature.

One weakness of the Action Research literature, which stresses collaborative inquiry, is in failing to connect with a growing literature on collaboration and networking (exemplified in the work of Rhodes et al., 2004; Toepell, 2001) while much of the collaboration literature acknowledges and builds on the work on the Action Research authors. Such ‘one-way’ connects are problematic, suggesting a certain insularity among the Action Research community, which may need to engage more substantively with work outside the traditional parameters of Action Research. This is partly because notions of inquiry have moved beyond the parameters of Action Research, and partly because other ways of collaborating are developing, as discussed in the OECD literature (2003, 2001).

Maintaining more porous boundaries between Action Research and other areas of literature, especially the literature on collaboration, allows those writing of Action Research to be more open to different forms of networking and collaboration, which in
turn allows for an evolution of Action Research where it maintains identity while incorporating other approaches. As one example, there is a growing discussion about new forms of leadership, in particular distributed leadership (Rhodes et al., 2001), which might be accessed to inform discussion about both facilitation and the role of the ‘critical friend’. Both roles can potentially be distributed in inquiry groups, so that inquiry groups build capacity by developing the skills of leadership among more participants rather than allocating and perpetuating the identification of leadership with one individual.

Insularity, and to some extent a power struggle, is also reflected in re-engagement of debates such as the one involving Kemmis (2005) and Elliott (2005). While the debate was re-engaged to commemorate and reflect on the Carr and Kemmis (1986) book ‘Becoming Critical’, it also reflects the academic Action Research community’s perennial desire to engage in debate with each other, while the world has moved on and may leave them behind. Yet Hyland and Noffke (2005), discussed above, have identified one possible route forward, overtly stating their philosophy, engaging in discourse with a range of possible outcomes, and demonstrating how to change both practice and perceptions in debates that might easily link to other areas of literature and practice. Their work encourages “examining inquiry assignments in political and historical perspectives” and “deconstructing experiences through discussion and critical reflection” (p. 378). In these ways, inquiry groups are encouraged to consider connections to politics and history while also building understanding of their inquiry through discussion within an inquiry group. They widen the parameters and possibilities of Action Research while also overtly stating that their goal is to improve teaching and learning through addressing contexts influencing schooling.
It could be argued that insularity has benefited the development of the Action Research literature by maintaining a constant focus over time on approaches to reflective practitioner research, whether methodological, philosophical or in exploring concepts of social justice and emancipation. But it has also damaged the capacity of Action Research academics to engage with and adapt the focus of Action Research to a changing world, and to better utilize knowledge from other areas.

Conclusion

Action Research has thrived and declined depending partly on the philosophy, focus and mandates of central state education systems, which appear increasingly unsupportive of inquiry approaches potentially challenging of state mandates and directions. Yet whether encouraged or discouraged by governments, the various academic champions of Action Research have continued to support teachers’ participation in reflective and collaborative inquiry, and teachers have continued to engage in systematic inquiry processes. Such efforts have continued across countries and continents over six decades, and which reflects longevity, stubbornness, and consolidation.

Approaches have widened to be less narrowly-defined and more inclusive of inquiry which overtly question social practices and social change, while maintaining a focus on changing individual practice. There is considerable evidence that teachers through inquiry approaches have resisted uniform state-mandated implementation approaches by continuing to reflect on practice through Action Research. But questions persist about whether inquiry practices can be maintained in some jurisdictions where state-mandated approaches using Standards and standardized assessments are dominant. I would argue that the evidence suggests both teacher and academic resilience that will ensure the continuation of Action Research approaches.
There are signs emerging within the Action Research literature that the issue of moving the experience and discussion of Action Research in more public ways is being promoted, with McNiff and Whitehead (2006) arguing that Action Researchers:

... would offer their ideas about what they know and how they have learned it, and they would put their ideas both to the test both of other people's opinions, and of how well their provisional theories stood up to the exigencies of new practices (p. 240).

While the literature is still dominated by an academic discourse written by university faculty, and has its limits in connecting with emerging literature on collaboration and networking, the emergence of teachers' web-based publications suggest a new channel for teacher publications which may challenge and offer an alternative to the academic control of Action Research writing.

The six threads of this analysis are connected by issues of knowledge and power, and the relationship between knowledge and power. Action Research is in one sense a way of creating knowledge – about one's own practice and about those contexts which influence or control it. It is also about how teacher knowledge, based on inquiry of those particular approaches in one person's practice researched by the teacher, can promote learning for the individual teacher, offer improvements to student learning, and potentially influence or challenge other forms of knowledge.

Going public with knowledge generated from Action Research enables the researcher both to build in confidence and capacity by accepting or withstanding challenges, or by enabling Action Researchers to adapt their claims or approaches after public dialogue. It allows for a consideration of claims to goodness in the research by linking its publicly-stated findings to a consideration of educational ends, perhaps by linking an inquiry on
inclusionary approaches in schools to the goal of individual participation in civil society, one feasible goal of education systems. By moving into a public sphere, it also enables Action Researchers to potentially challenge power structures by the articulation of ideas and approaches, based on evidence, which may not conform to a centrally imposed mandate. The connection of knowledge and power therefore occurs when teacher knowledge generated from Inquiry moves into more public spaces through reporting, presentations and discourse, and thereby challenges current power structures.

2.4 Networks and Collaborations in Education and Business

Rationale for considering this area of research

In the section of this study exploring Action Research I argued that proponents of Action Research may have become insular, in part because they may have failed to connect with much of the recent literature on networking and collaboration. To justify that claim I need to explore the literature on networking and collaboration, and connect it to being relevant to an exploration of teacher inquiry. Some key areas of the literature on professional development include a focus on collaboration and networking. Collaboration is part of teacher inquiry. Networking involves collaboration across organizational boundaries to meet common needs. Yet the teacher inquiry literature generally minimizes or ignores the connection. This exploration of the literature on networking and collaboration therefore seeks to consider whether making such a connection has utility for the development of teacher inquiry. This review explores contextual as well as conceptual factors. If the BCTF is seeking partners for its teacher inquiry projects, as this research demonstrates, then it needs to be aware of what is written and understood about networks and collaborations. If the world is changing towards greater utilization of networks and collaborations, then teacher inquiry groups and their sponsors – unions, school districts
and universities, may need to consider whether this trend has utility and how it can contribute to building successful collaborative inquiry. This review assists such deliberations.

**Networking and collaboration in education: OECD and other perspectives**

This section of the review considers various possible future contexts provided by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as well as linking the OECD reports to the literature on collaboration in education.

OECD reports on the theme of Schooling for Tomorrow (2001, 2003) consider networking in the context of three potential scenarios for schooling in the future. These include an unraveling of existing arrangements with either an extended and entrenched bureaucracy or greater market/choice-based solutions; shrinking public schooling because of teacher shortages accompanied by desperate proliferations of unsustainable innovations, or because of the growth of electronic learning systems; and re-schooling, in which schools become reinvented as focused learning organizations that develop learning in the context of the knowledge economy.

The reports contain a plethora of definitions, components, and qualities of networks, while also admitting that little consensus exists on definition. One of the OECD definitions stated by Van Aalst that the term “networking” refers to the systematic establishment and use (management) of internal and external links (communications, interaction, and co-ordination) between people, teams, or organizations (“nodes”) in order to improve performance (OECD, 2003, p. 34).
Perhaps more useful than the search for consensus in definition by the OECD are the various attempts to describe attributes or qualities of networks that make them of utility for organizational and professional learning. Van Aalst (2003) describes four advantages in networks:

- networks open access to a variety of sources of information
- they offer a broader range of learning opportunities than in hierarchical organizations
- they promise a more flexible while more stable base for co-ordinated learning than does the anonymity of the market; and they help to create and access tacit knowledge (OECD, 2003, p. 35).

Attributes arguably more recognizable in and appropriate for an educational context were described by Hopkins (2003) in the following typology:

- At its most basic level, networks may be simply groups of practitioners joining together for a common purpose and sharing good practice.
- More ambitiously, networks can join together groups of teachers and schools joining together with the explicit aim of enhancing teaching and learning, not just of sharing practice.
- Networks can also serve not just the purpose of knowledge transfer and school improvement, but also join together groups of stakeholders to implement specific policies locally and possibly nationally.
- An extension of this way of working is found when groups of networks, within and outside of education, link together for system improvement in terms of social justice and inclusion.
- Finally, there is the possibility of groups of networks working together not just on a social justice agenda, but also as an explicit agency for system renewal and transformation (OECD, 2003, p. 160-161).

The OECD’s Schooling for Tomorrow reports consider a wide range of networking options as holding great promise to promote collaboration and teacher Professional development, which they claim appears consistent across provincial and national boundaries. But there also exists clear evidence of fragility in many networks and collaborations, an area further explored in the later section on networks and collaborations outside of education. Impermanence of networks should not be confused with failure – networks are rarely permanent, more often established for a specific
purpose, and should therefore fold and reform as different priorities emerge. Knowing
to when to end a network or a collaboration, therefore, appears equally important as
knowing when to start or to continue it.

The utility of the OECD’s view and examination of networking is that it places the
concept within various futuristic contexts. Its weakness is that it fails to link to an
existing literature on teacher networks, perhaps best explored by Lieberman and Grolnick
(1997), who concluded:

Our look across networks helps us to understand their strong contextual nature,
their infinite variety of purpose and character, and their similar organizational
tensions. Regardless of their individual differences, they appear to have in
common the ways in which they bring people together and organize their work:
agendas that are more often challenging than prescriptive; learning that is more
indirect than direct; formats for work more collaborative than individualistic;
attempts at change more integrated than fragmented; approaches to leadership
more facilitative than directive (p. 213).

There appears to be a greater sense of collegial, practitioner-controlled sharing implied in
Lieberman and Grolnick’s work than in much of the OECD literature, which implies a
greater managerial control of networks. Thus there may be significant differences in
networks depending on the locus of control, in particular where the control is managerial
or in the hands of practitioners. Making the implicit explicit might be a basis for
clarifying the form and nature of networks.

In order to develop effective networks, alliances, or collaborations, it may be important to
build on existing knowledge from a variety of sources – within the traditional education
literature, from organizations such as the OECD, and from the federal Canadian research
agency the Social Science and Humanities Research Council - SSHRC (2004), and from
sources not usually accessed by educational researchers. A later section examines one such source – the literature on collaboration and alliances from the world of business.

Similar to Lieberman and Grolnick in its view of collegiality is the collaboration described by Erickson, Minnes-Brandes, Mitchell and Mitchell (2005) who differentiated the nature of their school-university collaboration from institutional structures such as Professional Development schools or the large-scale consortia of some state-sponsored networks. Erickson et al. instead describe and argue for smaller-scale, informal and local partnerships between school and university-based educators. One key difference also appears in the statement of three desirable outcomes which the participants aimed to achieve, making these among the few to aim for creating professional development as an enjoyable experience:

- a classroom learning environment that is both fruitful and enjoyable for all of the participants;
- a functional and cost-effective model of professional development with a focus on learning for all of the participants involved; and
- a professional development setting that yields functional and purposeful knowledge for all the participants (p. 789).

Within educational collaborations, the nature of leadership is crucial. Much of the literature points to a non-hierarchical form of leadership, with Rhodes et al. (2004) arguing that there exists a growing realization that ‘dispersed’ or ‘delegated’ leadership is crucial to organizational success, rather than forms of hierarchical leadership. Within such concepts, teacher leadership is clearly possible and often a reality. They suggest that teacher leadership occurs in three areas:

- Leadership of students or other teachers, facilitator, coach, mentor, trainer, curriculum specialist, creating new approaches, leading study groups
- Leadership of operational tasks: keeping the school organized and moving towards its goals, through roles such as head of department, Action Researcher, member of task forces
• Leadership through decision-making or partnership: membership of school improvement teams, membership of committees, instigator of partnerships with business, higher education institutions, school districts and parent groups (p. 62).

One of the most powerful descriptions of leadership applied in educational settings was described by Jackson and Payne (2002), quoted in Rhodes et al. (2004) and might well form the ideal of teacher leadership within collaborative inquiry groups:

In the literature from the ‘learning organizations field’, it is viewed that leaders are stimulators (who get things started); they are storytellers (to encourage dialogue and aid understanding); they are networkers and problem solvers too. They tend to value a wider social repertoire than has been customary in hierarchical educational settings, in order to encourage openness and to foster and support relationships during times when members are wrestling with ambiguity. They will build trust. They will model improvisation and be comfortable with risk-taking and spontaneity. They will also care, deeply, about teachers and about children and about education because that is the source of emotional energy for others. Intriguingly they will be less personally ambitious, perhaps a long time in post, and will instead be remorseless about improvement. As leaders, they will place priority on the school as a context for adult learning. They will support staff at all levels to be able to make more sense of and interpret the emerging circumstances of school improvement (p. 115).

Toepell (2001) differentiated between collaboration and co-operation:

When people work together cooperatively, they involve themselves with tasks to help each other out. When people work together collaboratively, they participate to meet a common goal. In defining collaborative investigation, McTaggart (1991) argues that collaboration means ‘sharing in the way research is conceptualized, practiced, and brought to bear on the life world. It means ownership…production of knowledge…improvement of practice’ (p. 171). Cooperative involvement in research, however, may include various roles short of the complete sharing McTaggart describes. Participants may, for example, advise about a research protocol or ‘simply go along, politely cooperating with Action Researchers’ (Peters, 1997, p. 67). Such an arrangement is one of cooperation not collaboration because not all contributors have control over the research or make decisions concerning it (p. 63).

There is some evidence that the tide may be turning away from the market model, with its assumptions that competing schools raise standards and quality of education, and is moving more towards a focus on collaboration and networking. Competition reduces the opportunities for schools to share and collectively build capacity because the ethos of
competition implies the withholding of information that may give another school any
derivative. The shift in thinking was identified by the UK’s National College for School
Leadership (NCSL, 2002), quoted in Rhodes (2004):

Collaboration is a more powerful, more positive motivating force than
competition. Networks are about schools working smarter together, rather than
harder alone, to enhance learning at every level of the education system. Strong
networks make it easier to create and share knowledge about what works in the
classroom, to learn from each others’ experiences, to find solutions to common
problems. By working together in this way, networked schools are making
professional practice visible and transferable (p. 15).

Networks and collaborations in business

The world of business has some useful and relevant literature to contribute to
understanding the pragmatics of collaboration. While the education literature largely
conceptualizes the ideas, the business literature offers pragmatic approaches that, when
applied, make collaborative ventures more likely to be successful. It may be productive
for teacher unions to consider and adapt some of these approaches within an educational
context.

The concept of “strategic alliances” has been discussed in a business context by Gulati
and Gargiulo (1998), who argue that collaboration across organizations can be highly
productive, enabling individual organizations to benefit more through the collaboration
than through an individual approach. Linden (2002) describes a world where barriers
separating organizations are crumbling:

The walls and lines separating organizations from one another, separating public
from private sector, separating agencies from their customers and clients, are
certainly blurring – if not coming down altogether. This is one of the most
powerful and fascinating stories of our new organizational society (p. 11).

In a later work, Linden (2003) explores the notion of collaborative leadership that he
argues is becoming more relevant in work environments with flattened hierarchies and
increased use of information technology. He offers ideas for collaborative leaders that
build relationships and capacity while avoiding individual credit. His concept is the
capacity and growth of the group rather than that of the individual. But he also articulatesour key qualities of effective collaborative leaders:

- tremendous persistence and energy and resolve with limited egos; passion about
  the outcome which attracts others, but “because the passion is about the
  outcome and not about their resume, they tend to build trust and goodwill”
- ability to pull (encourage, invite) rather than push (order or pressure), in part
  because they have no formal hierarchical authority
- capacity to think systemically, understanding interconnections in complex
  systems and how other organizations work.

Linden’s view of collaboration is that of a dynamic, fluid, and collective focus on an
approach which is not individualistic but collective, not personal but focusing on a goal
or a task in which all the collaborators have an investment and a motivation to achieve.
Yet his exploration of leadership qualities suggests that collaborations often have strong
yet non-charismatic leadership in which individuals initiate, encourage, and sustain
leadership over time. Linden therefore balances the individual and the collective,
reminding us that groups often require skills and strengths from individuals to make the
group functional and effective. His exploration of leadership differs from the notion of
critical friend while also incorporating some elements of critical friendship. His notion of
collaborative leadership includes a notion of getting the task completed while
maximizing the capacity of individuals in the group and using a sophisticated knowledge
of organizations and context. Thus, facilitation and extension, while important, are also
part of a wider repertoire of systemic knowledge. Linden is arguing that a collaborative
leader needs to be more than a critical friend to make collaboration work, and she or he
also needs to know how systems work and how to work within such systems. What his

1 http://www.pfdf.org/knowledgecenter/L2L/summer2003/linden.html
analysis lacks is a sense of when to challenge organizations or systems. One useful route for teacher inquiry may be to combine the skills and capacity of the 'critical friend' with the knowledge and capacity of the 'collaborative leader', but to build in system knowledge and system challenge when needed.

A “strategic alliance” was defined by Bartling (1998) as “a co-operative arrangement among two or more entities that combine their respective strengths to achieve compatible objectives while they retain their individual identities and share in the risks and rewards.” Some teacher unions are also using the term “strategic alliances” in their consideration of potential collaborations (AFT, 2001).

Many authors also explore strategic alliances and collaborations because they have been found to be increasingly necessary and because many fail (Parise & Sàsson, 2002; Koza & Lewin, 2000). The literature on strategic alliances uses language similar to a more personal strategic alliance also prone to failure – marriage – with consideration of four terms: trust, commitment, control, and learning. A useful exploration of these themes can be found in the work of Inkpen and Currall (2004). They argue for evolution in trust and processes over time, with varying levels of formal monitoring depending on initial trust levels – the greater the initial trust, the less need for formal monitoring. Trust, they argue, is also related to risk, whether relational (a partner’s opportunistic actions serving the individual organization rather than the collaboration), or in terms of capacity (the ability of each partner to fulfill its obligations). During the evolution of projects there is a trade-off between trust and control, whether formally or informally. Evolution is often
identified within phases, with an initial “honeymoon” period, followed by a high-risk period if trust is weak. If the second phase is survived, then risk of failure is reduced. Cullen, Johnson, and Sakano (2000) explore what they term the “soft side” of alliances, namely the development and management of the relationship developing during the alliance. They describe “credibility” trust (whether a partner has the intent and ability to meet commitments) and “benevolent” trust (the belief that a partner will act in good faith). While separating the terms “trust” and “commitment”, they argue that both are crucial to effective alliances for two reasons. The first is that contracts or other formal agreements can never cover the contingencies that will arise. The second is that any partnership between companies or organizations creates a strong potential for dysfunctional conflict and mistrust. Cullen et al’s (2000) exploration of learning during alliances involves the sharing of “tacit” knowledge, which includes “skills, capabilities, and ways of doing things which are part of the organization’s culture. Tacit knowledge is not written down and people are often unaware of its exact nature” (p. 227).

They also argue for reduced formal, contractual processes and improved personal relationships to ensure effective partnership, offering eight “essential factors” to enable partners to build trust and commitment, which include understanding reciprocity, mutual benefits, and an understanding of cultural differences. While the latter is focused on cultural differences in international alliances, the concept could also be applied to promoting cultural understanding between organizations in the same city or province but with quite different organizational cultures, such as unions and school district management.
Wallace (2004) explores two methods and models for building trust. In the aptly if unimaginatively-named ‘Trust-Building’ model he stresses compatible values, ‘gut feeling, process engagement, and on-going communication. In this model, Wallace is arguing for using instinct, but also for taking steps to engage and consider the relationship during the engagement while also taking some opportunities and risks in terms of communication. In the “Know Yourself” model, Wallace promotes exploration of what each partner knows (and does not know) about self and the partner, or their respective organizations, in terms of “sweet spots”, “blind spots”, and “danger zones” - a kind of reality check and communication about “good news and bad news” to see what is viewed commonly or differently by those involved in the collaboration. By such exploration, dialogue and disclosure build trust, Wallace also warns that building trust can be more complicated when issues of race, ethnicity, and gender are involved.

While much of the business literature focuses on capitalist business enterprises linked to economic reward, the focus on building trust and commitment in a pragmatic relationship has much to offer to educators who are considering how to work across organizations, in collaborations which involve teacher unions, school district management, universities, and community organizations, all with very different cultures and often with different ways of seeing the world. Another thread in the business literature on alliances and collaborations stresses that in effective collaborations, partners learn from each other, with such learning increasing understanding and respect, hardly a negative in a fractious BC educational context that sorely needs greater levels of understanding and respect.
There is some evidence that the concept of collaborations and alliances is becoming more common in public sector organizations (Linder & Brooks, 2004; Linden, 2002) as public sector organizations increasingly find it difficult to achieve desired ends without some form of collaboration.

The business literature on collaborations and strategic alliances' greatest strength and applicability for teacher unions, or for any organization considering supporting teacher inquiry, lies in the discussion of planning, maintaining, and supporting relationships in collaboration between people working in different organizations. Its focus is pragmatic, and, while perhaps limited intellectually, it has considerable utility for the practical focus on building and maintaining collaborative inquiry groups. Intellectual discourse may have its place, but so does information which helps groups, and leaders, to function effectively and respectfully. Because the literature from the world of business does this, it has utility for this research and for the development of collaborative inquiry in educational settings.

**Conclusion**

This area of the literature explores the promise and pitfalls of collaboration and networking, but there is little analysis of where either is inappropriate or unproductive. Both networking and collaboration rely on the assumption that both parties gain through a connection, yet there is an understated discussion of collaboration where one party seeks to manipulate or gain advantage in the education literature. In considering the business literature, there is a refreshing earthiness and reality absent from the educational literature. The business literature has a way of 'cutting to the chase' that the educational literature might emulate, and its pragmatic consideration of issues such as trust and commitment offer a useful contribution to understanding collaborative processes. Also
useful is its claim that some seeking collaborations may have little to offer, and that processes to ensure adequate contributions may have utility. There are insights from the networking and collaboration literature that can be adapted for teacher inquiry groups and which can be used to consider the possibilities and pitfalls of collaboration both within a group and in terms of inter-organizational collaboration. The focus on forms of distributed leadership may also be of utility for teacher inquiry groups, and for the possible rotation of the role of critical friend.

The literature's consideration of why networks and collaborations are increasingly necessary is convincing, but somewhat limited in its focus on self-interest, particularly in the business literature. The necessity for increased collaboration is linked to the rapidity of change, and to limited resources. In the private sector this is an adequate rationale, but it falls short in public education systems. While resources are limited and often strained in public education systems, the need for collaboration also links to the need to build dialogue and trust across frequently fractured educational communities. If the business world's motivation for networking and collaboration is profit enhancement, then the education sector perhaps needs to more clearly define what I believe might be its dual goals – better access to information, improved use of resources and knowledge dissemination through collaboration, but also an improvement in fractured and unproductive relationships. Education needs to better utilize its collective resources, both capital and human, and the literature on networks and collaboration may help by offering promising ideas in cross-organizational inquiry collaborations to build more productive relationships.
2.5 Good Teaching and Good Schools: ‘Public’ and ‘Private’ Space in Schools and Society, and the Connections to Teacher Inquiry and Professional Development

Rationale for considering this area of literature

Much of the literature on teacher inquiry and professional development is concerned with the ‘means’ rather than the ‘ends’ of education. Teacher inquiry and professional development (both ‘means’) are often considered without questioning why either is being done, and to what ends. This exploration of the literature connects ‘means’ and ‘ends’, in part by asking what schools are for. In answering that question, a case can be made from a range of literature that if schools are intended to build participation in democratic societies, then some current educational ‘means’ may be too narrow to meet a wider view of societal needs. By considering what kind of society is required (‘ends’), then it is possible to examine ‘means’ and decide whether they contribute to the desired ends. One ‘mean’ described in the literature concerns the building of judgment in individuals so that citizens are critically able to judge what is good in society, and avoid or counter excesses such as the rise of totalitarianism. The building of judgment usually involves the creation of a safe and private space for individuals to consider ideas and to build skills of judgment before going out and testing those ideas in more public spaces. By exploring this area of literature it is possible to consider teacher inquiry groups as one space to build judgment and skills by the sharing and testing of ideas within the group. Teacher inquiry groups reflect a move out of the private space of an individual’s teaching practice but still reflect some safety and privacy. Similarly, presenting or writing the results of ‘inquiry’ moves the individual out of the safety of the inquiry group into a fully public space, where ‘inquiry’ can be extended and critiqued. These ideas will be considered in this review of the literature.
Goodlad remarked that in his own visits to many schools, he found little evidence of goals consciously shared by the teachers and precious little dialogue about what their schools are for (Goodlad, 1984, p. 50). In Goodlad’s reflection on the purpose of schools he articulated four categories of goals for schools: academic, vocational, social/civic/cultural, personal. Goodlad complained that the ends of schooling are not explicitly stated or explored by educators. This section of the literature review steps back from Goodlad’s consideration of goals to consider even more fundamental questions about means and ends: What is good teaching? What are good schools? How do we know when either exists? To what ends are means connected? This section of the literature review will consider whether it is possible to link teacher participation in teacher inquiry as professional development to supporting good teaching and good schools, and to consider why this may be of importance.

In the voluminous literature on professional development, the connections between professional development and good teaching are rarely explored. There appears to be an assumption that undertaking professional development somehow translates into improved teaching, or improved student learning, yet evidence to support such an assumption is rarely provided. Some efforts have been made to link professional development to improved test scores in the USA (Lasley, Siedentrop and Yinger, 2006; Schacter & Thum, 2005), but these reflect a concept of professional development as imposed and narrowly-focused Staff Development, where teachers are required to implement approaches such as packaged curriculum, with little room for reflection or adaptation. With this approach, the teacher is a technician, implementing a program, the success of the professional development being measured by student test scores; higher scores
meaning the professional development was successful. This assumes causal relationship, ignores all other possible variables impacting on test scores, and reduces teaching to a mechanistic approach which I would argue is not ‘good teaching’, basing such an argument on the evidence from a range of literature which will be explored below.

Before linking professional development to good teaching, it is necessary to consider what is meant by the term ‘good teaching’. In order to address this question, an article by Fenstermacher and Richardson (2005) will be used to introduce the notions of ‘good’, ‘successful’, and ‘quality’ teaching, with further references to connecting literature as required.

Fenstermacher and Richardson consider ‘good’ teaching to be grounded in the task of teaching; they consider ‘successful’ teaching to be grounded in the achievement of students, while ‘quality’ teaching is defined as including both ‘good’ and ‘successful’ teaching. ‘Quality’ teaching occurs when both are present and meet or exceed ‘standards of adequacy’ which are linked to a range of literature, and which are considered through discourse rather than exact prescriptions. As an example, the notions reflected in ‘Standards’ can be explored and extended, adapted and applied in ways appropriate to the individual teacher and in the context in which the teacher works. They might also be connected to the ‘ends’ of education, perhaps with building civil society and democratic participation. This sense of ‘Standards’ differentiates Fenstermacher and Richardson’s perspective from simplistic notions of teaching standards, epitomized by checklists, an example of which has been developed by the BC College of Teachers². Such lists are

² http://www.bcct.ca/documents/edu_stds.pdf
simplistic because they reduce the complex craft of teaching to lists which fail to capture the essence of good teaching.

Fenstermacher and Richardson’s notion of ‘good’ teaching is built on two concepts (logical and psychological acts) developed by Thomas Green (1971) and a third (moral act) which they derive from a wider body of literature:

The two from Green are the logical and the psychological acts of teaching. The logical acts include activities such as defining, demonstrating, explaining, correcting and interpreting. The psychological acts encompass such things as motivating, encouraging, rewarding, punishing, planning and evaluating. To these two task categories we add a third, the moral act of teaching wherein the teacher both exhibits and fosters such moral traits as honesty, courage, tolerance, compassion, respect, and fairness (p. 195).

They further articulate their sense of good teaching by linking content, methods, competence and moral defensibility, suggesting that teaching’s craft is both complex and has a moral foundation, so that teaching is not a purely technical concept but is linked to higher purposes linked to individual and societal morality:

By good teaching we mean that the content taught accords with disciplinary standards of adequacy and completeness, and that the methods employed are age-appropriate, morally defensible, and undertaken with the intention of enhancing the learner’s competence with respect to the content studied (p. 191).

Fenstermacher and Richardson’s reference to morality as a core concept in good teaching is not new, and can be traced back to Aristotle. John Dewey (1922) also addressed what Irwin-DeVitis and DeVitis. (1998) termed the shaping of ‘human dispositions’ by teachers as a moral act:

John Dewey also focuses on the shaping of human dispositions, over time, through the cultivation of habit, conduct, and reflective thought and action. For him, education is fundamentally moral and social (p. 268).

To more clearly separate ‘task’ and ‘achievement’ concepts, Fenstermacher and Richardson suggest that evidence of learning need not be present for good teaching to
occur, but that such evidence must be present in 'quality' teaching. They argue that 'not all instances of good teaching are successful, and not all instances of successful teaching are good' (p. 192). In illustrating how good teaching may not be successful, they show that a teacher can in theory be doing everything right but students may not be engaging and learning, possibly because of factors external to the teaching/learning occasion – examples of hungry or abused children could be situations where children are less likely to engage in school learning activities because of external factors. As an example of teaching which could be successful but not good, a person could be successfully taught to kill, but such learning would not be good or morally defensible.

Fenstermacher and Richardson offer a theoretical and empirical analysis of quality teaching, identifying three 'research programs' to illustrate the concept of successful teaching:

- Teaching as transmission - process/product research
- Teaching as cognition - cognitive science
- Teaching as facilitation - constructivism

Each of these areas of research are discussed in relation to what each says about 'good' and 'successful' teaching, and how each addresses the three elements of 'good teaching' (logical, psychological, moral). Essentially, they argue that each states a different notion of what is good teaching, by, for example differing in whether they focus on outcomes of learning or on the needs of the learner. While they explore these concepts, Fenstermacher and Richardson argue that conceptual differences in approach do not prevent the identification of good teaching, which they consider partly teacher and school-created and partly demonstrating teacher and school capacity to respond to students' needs and societal circumstances: "Good teaching, then, while constituted by elements that cohere
in the person of the teacher, is enabled by nurturing conditions and is also responsive to these same conditions” (p. 208).

It could also be argued that any of these might constitute good education if they move into more public spaces, in which they are tested and challenged, and where the means of teaching - the three approaches - are considered in relation to the ends of education, which in this section is being argued to primarily focus on building individual participation in civil society, developing moral codes within a democratic society. Methods of teaching may vary in relation to different student needs, or within different contexts, but the means are not ends in themselves. They should be connected to an explicit end, or series of ends.

Fenstermacher and Richardson believe that four conditions must be present for students not only to engage but to be successful:

- Willingness and effort by the learner
- A social surround supportive of teaching and learning
- Opportunity to teach and learn
- Good teaching

These conditions clearly include not only individual responsibilities (teacher and student), and teacher skill and capacity, but also a consideration of school, system and societal contexts which positively or negatively impact successful teaching and learning. Good teaching is but one of four components in building an education system in which students learn. While Fenstermacher and Richardson state these four conditions, their key focus is on the notion of good teaching. Yet by identifying other contexts and responsibilities, they build a case that other factors must be considered. This consideration of contexts by Fenstermacher and Richardson links to a similar focus in the
literature on Action Research (Hyland & Noffke, 2005). Thus, the focus on context in both areas of literature appears important in considering the nature of ‘good’ education. If ‘social surround’ includes school and family contexts, then issues of deprivation in children’s lives are relevant to building successful student learning. Similarly, the ‘opportunity to teach and learn’ means much more than the basic interaction or relationship between student and teacher, and may include a consideration of inadequate education spending perhaps reflected in overcrowded classrooms or limited availability of resources such as text books.

Fenstermacher and Richardson argue that quality teaching can be made better by a focus on both teachers and contexts, and that the focus on contexts has implications for educational policy: “there are policy alternatives for improving teaching, and that attending specifically to the practices of classroom teachers is not the sole approach to obtaining quality teaching” (p. 208).

Such extensions of factors necessary for successful learning then extend the potential focus of teacher inquiry and professional development beyond a consideration of practice when teachers interact with students. Cuban (2003) linked educational and social context to students’ learning with an impassioned critique of Standards-based educational reformers who ignored social context in their claims about student learning:

 Thus, the claims that all children can learn - splendid in its appeal to color and class blindness and its devotion to equal access - is only the beginning of a paragraph. The full paragraph should read: All children can learn if state legislatures provide schools with adequate funds, if all children are healthy and ready for school, if they have certified teachers earning adequate salaries, small class size, and sufficient time to learn according to their stages of intellectual and social development. We only hear from passionate reformers the opening sentence, seldom the crucial word if and what follows it (p. 43-44).
If the heart of good education is dependent on the relationship between students and teachers, and the practices that are developed during such relationships, Fenstermacher and Richardson, as does Cuban, suggest that the heart needs other blood to keep it pumping, and that other blood comes from the educational system and societal contexts which Fenstermacher and Richardson label as ‘social surround’s and ‘opportunity to teach and learn’.

Their analysis perhaps offers some answers to the divide between those looking to conduct inquiry with or without a focus on issues of social justice referred to in the review of the Action Research literature. The apparent dichotomy between the two camps might be addressed by understanding that all such reflections have the capacity to improve both teaching and learning, for quality teaching, if using the concepts developed by Fenstermacher and Richardson, cannot occur unless some external conditions (e.g. adequate funding) or contexts (e.g. poverty) are addressed. Nor can addressing those conditions without considering what occurs in classrooms produce good teaching. Perhaps one key to developing future inquiry models might include the combination of inquiry into teaching practices and social contexts in the same studies. How might teachers build good teaching that is responsive both to students’ needs and which includes a consideration of social justice? Similarly, if inquiry leads to an identification of a systemic approach or dilemma which impacts learning, then inquiry into systemic issues can be justified because such inquiry can also lead to the creation of good and responsive teaching. Linked also to these notions is the concept of moving the inquiry into more public space, as it might be expected that consideration of systemic issues requires moving into a space where discussion might occur.
The notion of teaching as a moral activity is mentioned but under-explored by Fenstermacher and Richardson in their 2005 paper, although some examples of moral areas and criteria for judging the moral act of teaching are provided. Teaching as a moral activity reflects a view that the core purpose of education can be defined in some way that includes notions of individual and civic morality, both linked to preservation and development of a democratic society in which all citizens participate. Fenstermacher and Richardson listed values which they considered appropriate to teach and model in teaching: honesty, courage, tolerance, compassion, respect, and fairness. Similar values were espoused by Carr (2005) who considered them pre-requisites for those engaged in teaching:

The key point is that those who lack certain fundamental qualities of ordinary moral human character and association — of temperance, courage, honesty, fairness (justice), wisdom (good practical judgment) — are unlikely to be effective teachers (p. 262).

Yinger (2005) proposed a vision for the future of teaching which consisted of three components, all including some notions of morality:

- Education rechartered as public good, with broad citizen participation in deciding goals and outcomes
- Teaching re-framed as a professional covenant, stressing moral purpose and imagination, social responsibility and personal caring
- Learning re-cast in its moral, cultural and human significance, in which healthy communities, good societies and sustainable ecosystems will be determined as much by moral choices as by scientific knowledge (p. 308-309).

While the above focus on 'good teaching' they also imply what constitutes a 'good' school. Cuban (2003) identified and listed five values that he believes are widely shared and which good schools should develop. These can be considered possible 'ends' of an education system and are included here to illustrate that while these ends may differ from those espoused by Fenstermacher and Richardson, they share the sense of education systems being the foundation of civic participation in a democratic society. By stating
these ‘ends’ publicly, the authors also encourage discussion of them, and place them firmly within a moral framework, with morality focusing on both the individual and the collective:

- Participation in and willingness to serve in local and national communities
- Open-mindedness to different opinions and a willingness to listen to such opinions
- Respect for values that differ from one’s own
- Treating individuals decently and fairly, regardless of background
- A commitment to reason through problems and struggle toward openly arrived at compromise (p. 46-47).

In considering how to judge whether a school is ‘good’, Cuban (2003) posed three questions:

- Are parents, staff, and students satisfied with what occurs in the school?
- Is the school achieving the explicit goals it set for itself?
- Are democratic behaviours, values and attitudes evident in the students? (p. 48).

Such criteria may be of low priority in many education systems which currently stress managerial efficiency and where success is measured in standardized tests which dominate system accountability processes and structures. If such tests dominate educational approaches, and drive teaching, then the focus on values must necessarily diminish. Criteria such as those developed by Cuban are highly unlikely to occur in jurisdictions with standards-based centralization and uniformity, yet Cuban offers a clear alternative to standardized accountability linked to narrowly defined school effectiveness, by stressing ‘good’ over ‘effective’ as the key concept of schooling, and linking the definition of goodness to a decent individual life and the need for a sustainable and sustaining democracy. Thus, the notion of ‘goodness’ is linked to the moral nature of schooling, while effectiveness is linked to managerial efficiency.
Others have developed alternative criteria for school accountability to make the criteria of accountability wider than achievement and explicitly arguing for the development of qualities in students that will lead to a good and worthwhile life while also building a democratic society. One such approach to a balanced form of accountability has been proposed by Jones (2004) who links it to five measures, including equity and access for students:

- the physical and emotional well-being of students
- student learning for a modern democratic society
- teacher learning compatible with adult learning principles
- equity and access, adding fairness to excellence
- school improvement, using self-assessment and adjustment

Such an approach widens the scope and nature of accountability in ways that encourages schools to address all learners' needs and avoid simplistic and standardized measurement. Yet the problem remains with such definitions as existed with some prescriptions for professional development – there is little explanation of 'how to get there', and little unpacking of the core criteria to consider what they mean. Yet even with these limits there appears to be little current appetite among governments for this more comprehensive notion of accountability than one based on managerial efficiency using standardized measurements. This may be because managerial models of efficiency and accountability common in business and industry are dominant in education systems, such models considering 'outputs' such as test scores as measures of individual, school or system success or failure.

Stack, Coulter, Grosjean, Mazawi and Smith (2006) argue that notions of industrial and educational enterprises are so different that transporting managerial models from industry or business has limited utility if developing values for participation in a democratic
society are at the core of the educational enterprise. They argued that ‘While schools continue to require efficient management, helping people to lead good and worthwhile lives is a different kind of enterprise than making cars” (p. 16).

Stack et al. (2006) summarized a two-thousand year long discussion of educational means and ends, and asked what educational ends are expected from education systems, and who gets to decide them. Their case is that if the ends of education (economic, social, and democratic) are rarely discussed then means can become more dominant in discourse but less rational because such means are not connected to defined ends. Student achievement measured by test scores can be a mean, but to what end? Does having students pass a test make them better citizens, or help them to think creatively in social or working environments? Does it build better social cohesion or a stronger economy? By failing to consider and connect both ends and means, Stack et al. argue that it may be less possible to state what a good school is. Is it traditional? Progressive? Does it pass most students on standardized scores? By overtly stating ends and means, the concept of a good school may be better defined, even though there are likely different definitions. Stack et al. quote Cuban (1997), who, after looking at a range of schools with a variation of approaches from traditional to progressive, argued that: “All of the schools were good - or educational – not only because they publicly justify how they try to be good, but also because they help others prepare to join the conversation about the good life” (p. 16).

This statement supports the notion that ‘good’ schools are not necessarily either traditional or progressive, but that either progressive or traditional examples could be good, or bad. Goodness does not necessarily reflect one form of pedagogy, so there may
be good and bad examples of constructivist teaching, or of teaching as transmission. Goodness, in Cuban’s view needs to be overt and publicly explored. Cuban’s comment about public justification opens a second front of the literature connected to good teaching and good schools which explores the nature of ‘private’ and ‘public’ in education and society.

This has been extensively discussed by Coulter, (1999, 2001, 2002), and Coulter and Wiens, (2002). Coulter primarily references Jurgen Habermas, and Hanna Arendt as two key authorities while tracing the debate on ‘private and public’ spaces back to Aristotle. Arendt stressed the need to provide children with privacy for the formation of identity while stating that one key role of teachers and a function of education systems is to enable children to move from their initial shelter of home and privacy, into a more public sphere of community. Children need privacy for purposes of development and adults need privacy for reflection, but Arendt argues that while privacy is one requirement to support children’s development, such privacy should be followed by a more public engagement in community and society. Her case is that the initial private space allows time for growth and development, in a safe environment. Moving from private to public builds community and allows the individual to test ideas in discussion with others, and to access and consider others’ thinking. A child needs to develop and to take gradual steps into public spaces and public discourses. Similarly, adults’ reflection may be private but resulting actions need to be more public. Moving from reflection to action therefore requires some form of judgment to be exercised (Coulter & Wiens, 2002) and requires moving from private reflection/space, into public discourse/action.
Arendt's arguments about the need for humans to exercise judgment and agency are moral and ethical, linking the lack of critical imagination in Adolf Eichman to his complicity in genocide. Individuals' compliance with systems can, as in Eichman's case, have devastating results for societies. Compliance with any system without critical imagination and judgment is, in Arendt's view, to be avoided, and one role of education systems is to develop the capacity for critical judgment. Transferring some of these concepts to the lives and work of teachers, Coulter and Wiens, (2002) argue:

Teachers are often encouraged to be compliant labourers, delivering curriculum using best practices and having their work checked by quality control testing tied to objective standards. Trapped in Arendt's social, teachers generally have few public or private spaces for dialogues with others or with themselves and few opportunities to use either visiting or critical imagination (p. 23).

It is within these 'spaces for dialogues' that this study places the work undertaken as teacher inquiry in the empirical study. Does teacher participation in inquiry projects build teacher judgment and agency, and might it challenge system orthodoxies – where teachers are forced to apply state or district mandates - by focusing explicitly on one or more students, on an educational approach, or on peer support, and by so doing engage with what Coulter calls the 'particular', and applying learning from the particular to the 'general'. 'Particular' relates to the individual occurrence, person or experience, what happens in one’s teaching or life. The 'general', on the other hand, may be a concept intended to be applied universally across a system, such as a curriculum or a policy mandate. Teacher inquiry seeks to explore the particular, perhaps exemplified by a focus on a student, or the classroom, and to consider the need to change individual (particular) practice. By going public with this inquiry, the inquiry process is open to external critique and extension, and questions can be asked about whether the inquiry links to an end which is 'good' in that it prepares individuals for participation in a democratic society,
while also making it open to adoption or adaptation. Imposition of the general on the particular, on the other hand, requires no reflection if, for example, it is a mandate, an order to be followed, thereby removing judgment and agency, and limiting the capacity of individuals to exercise their critical imagination.

Coulter's analysis of Habermas traces Habermas's description of the evolution of public and private space through ancient Greek and Roman societies through to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' development of two public spheres: the political and the literary, and two private spheres, the market and the family, with, over the next two centuries, corporations exercising greater control over the nature of work and the state increasing control over what had been the private space of family through, for example, public schooling. Initially calling for a democratization of major public institutions, Coulter claims that Habermas:

...abandons the idea that formal organizations can be democratized by making them more public. Instead Habermas (1992: 444) shifts to calling for the development of communicative action in lifeworlds outside formal organizations, thereby creating 'a democratic dam against the colonializing encroachment of system imperatives on areas of the lifeworld (2002, p. 31).

Habermas's distinction between worlds of work and life implies that humans have agency and can choose to act within institutions, thereby being subject to some institutional norms and control. Or they may act outside, by establishing different kinds of discourse and by creating new discourse ethics, which might better challenge formal organizations and state control partly because the nature of discourse may be different, partly because the discourse cannot be controlled by institutions and organizations. One example of building an external discourse is found in the work of the UBC Discourse Group. This group, which includes university academics, classroom teachers, school administrators
and a teacher union employee recently published a paper, building a case to counter proposals to impose and monitor ‘Standards of Teaching’ in BC. This group, all working in the education system, wrote as individuals without organization support or approval, and submitted their paper into various public spaces to stimulate discussion on the proposed Standards. Each individual exercised agency, and while each person declared his or her organizational affiliation, none requested approval or linked their views to the views of their employer. This is one example of moving into more public space, to offer a view and to engage in discourse. To engage in such discourses necessitates moving into a more public space, and teachers:

...must be given the requisite conditions for this kind of communication. Teachers require privacy to prepare themselves for the task; they too need to try out new roles in safety, to form their own identity as educators. Teachers also need to recognize, however, that their roles are public concerns and that they have a responsibility to initiate and sustain public discussions about education and teaching; they cannot remain in the comparative safety of their schools, their districts, their unions (or their universities) (Coulter, 2002, p. 40).

Achinstein (2002a) linked the discussion of private and the public to teachers’ learning communities. She referenced the work of Ferdinand Tonnies (1887-1963) who made a case that there had been a shift away from community-oriented bonds and supports in the move from traditional and pre-industrial eras to modern society, using two terms to define and differentiate the shift. These terms were ‘Gemeinschaft’ and ‘Gesellschaft’, which are defined below:

Gemeinschaft: a strong community based on familial ties or strong values. There are three forms, built on kinship (family), place (common geography) or mind (shared values).

Gesellschaft: public world or society, in a world where community values are replaced by contractual values of modern bureaucratic society. Membership of an organization may often be defined through formalized roles and hierarchies, some common goals and mutual self-interest.
Achinstein argued that with a decline of community in many western societies, schools are now expected to offer and foster community in schools, both among students and for teachers in the construction of professional learning communities. But she argues that those promoting community have ‘too rosy a conception of community’ (p 6), that they portray naïve, unified and uninformed images, and may disguise teachers’ status in bureaucratic systems:

Promoters of teacher professional communities would also have us believe they are all alike, yet sharp differences arise between professional communities founded on divergent ideologies, beliefs and norms. One community may promote social justice while another reinforces the status quo. These different ideologies matter in how schooling is enacted and for what ends (p. 8).

The utility of Achinstein’s work for the purposes of this study is primarily in terms of linking the concept of private and public to the nature of teachers’ professional communities, where she argues that conflict in such communities is as likely a norm as collaboration, and that the key to successful community is how the community deals with divergent and sometimes opposing views. She describes some communities that simply ostracize or exclude people with views divergent from a controlling norm, and others which welcome diversity of perspectives as contributing to understanding. Her argument, in a separate paper (Achinstein, 2002b), is that the latter are of greater utility in developing teacher learning because they incorporate a richer and more inclusive debate:

The study challenges current thinking on community by showing that conflict is not only central to community, but how teachers manage conflicts, whether they suppress or embrace their differences, defines the community borders and ultimately the potential for organizational learning and change (p. 421).

While Achinstein (supported by Goulet, Krentz and Christiansen, 2003) argues that conflict is a norm in collaboration, Ingersoll (1996, 2003) argues that increased teacher autonomy and increased teacher control reduce conflict in schools:
The data also show that the good school is characterized by high levels of teacher control. Schools with empowered teachers have less conflict among students, faculty and principals, and less teacher turnover (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 223).

The results indicate that increases in both faculty influence and teachers' autonomy are significantly associated with decreases in school conflict (Ingersoll, 1996, p. 159).

Ingersoll's work suggests that flattened hierarchies and distributed leadership might contribute to improved school climates, another context which could be a factor influencing whether 'good' education occurs. The argument here is that the context of schooling could include issues of control, and power in the school, and that where teachers are empowered and autonomous, then better education is likely to occur.

Ingersoll's statements are less complete than they could be. Autonomy by itself is not a virtue - as Fenstermacher and Richardson stated, with their argument about successful teaching - that it may be successful but may not always be good. So autonomy could lead to poor teaching and minimal learning. Autonomy needs also to be tested in more public spaces, with peers, perhaps, so that teaching is less private and is more openly shared and discussed. Teacher control with more public demonstration and sharing then becomes a more powerful force, harnessing the creative energy of autonomous individuals but connecting them in public spaces to discuss teaching and learning, to share ideas and critiques, and to connect their autonomous 'means' to defined 'ends'.

The millenia-old debate about ends and means, about the private and public for individuals and society, has a connection to this research. Teachers engaged in collaborative inquiry are moving out of the private space where teaching and thinking about education is an isolated and private activity, into a more public space during the inquiry where they are sharing ideas, challenging self and others, exposing their own frailty and searching for better ways to work, to teach, to encourage student learning.
What they may not be doing is exploring why they are doing this, and what the desired and actual ends of such approaches may be, and how they might fit within a view of good teaching and good education.

This is not to argue that the general theme of moving into more public space has not been discussed in the literature, but rather to make a case that the discussion has largely focused on the ‘means’ of moving into more public space than considering why and how such ‘means’ link to the purposes or ‘ends’ of education. Indeed, in analyzing the literature on collaborative professional development, a key theme involves teachers moving from the isolation of teaching and individual reflection towards greater levels of communication and sharing in more public spaces. This might be in conversation with a colleague, in discussions within a teacher research group, in sharing or presenting information at forum involving other teachers, or in publications and reports. Christensen (2006) articulated on view of teachers moving their inquiry into more public spaces through presentations:

Teachers who present - and over the years we have worked to enlist as many teachers as presenters as possible - learn twice as much. They not only engage as participants in the workshops throughout the day, they also gain clarity about their own practice by sharing it with other teachers. In presenting to their colleagues, they teach their lessons, but they also teach the underlying assumptions about good pedagogy and content knowledge that animate their work. Teacher-centred professional development doesn’t happen unless district and school - administrators and curriculum leaders have intimate knowledge of teachers’ practice. Just putting teacher X in front of the faculty will not lead to the kind of professional development I am advocating. Curriculum leaders must take the effort to listen to teachers’ conversations when they talk about their classrooms and their students, they must observe teachers at work with students and colleagues, and they must look for exemplary practice and curricular expertise. Ultimately, they must have a vision of professional development that puts classroom teachers at the center (p. 6).
I will separate the notion of moving into public space from the concepts of collaboration and networking. Collaboration essentially involves moving from the individual to the collective, whether in terms of sharing the individual focus or in terms of developing agency. But moving into more public space is a different idea. It involves more than meeting and talking with other practitioners, and reflects a widening of participation potentially involving different audiences, and a wider access to information about the inquiry with less control by those who provide the information. By moving into a more public space, the individual is taking risks beyond those inherent in collaboration.

Collaboration can be withdrawn, and usually involves peers. Going public is more akin to the notion of ‘coming out’ in the gay community. Once ‘out’ and publicly gay, there is no going back into the proverbial closet. It is irreversible and implies some abdication of ownership and control as others engage with the ideas presented and discussed.

The purpose of accessing the literature in this section of the review is to build understanding of why moving into more public space to debate and articulate notions of good teaching and good schools is of importance. Going public enables educators to engage in discourse, with peers, or community. This potentially builds understanding of educational means and ends through dialogue, and makes possible the challenging of such ideas during discourse. Going public can facilitate the consideration of different pedagogical approaches and bring practical, ethical and moral considerations to the processes of teaching and learning. By doing so it can challenge monolithic systems forcing compliance and uniformity of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, finding examples where such approaches may not benefit students or society. It can and it might do all of these things, but it may not, because human agency or compliance is involved.
When one reads of Arendt, who uses examples from Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, there may be a tendency to say "Ah, yes, but that was a long time ago, and the lessons have been learned." Arendt discussed the inability of the academically brilliant academic, Heidegger, to make a good judgment when he became complicit with the Nazi regime. She was stunned by the ordinariness of Adolf Eichman, who failed to exercise any judgment in his role supporting the extermination of millions. Some lack of judgment is likely always within each of us, and may be more prevalent in education systems than has been considered. For some, using the analogies of Nazi Germany as an implicit analogy to education systems may be seen as inappropriate or offensive, Educational organizations, after all, do not commit genocide. Yet the issue is not the enormity or the extreme of the actions, but the philosophical argument which employs the 'worst case' scenario of Nazi Germany to make a case that compliance without judgment is wrong, and that each of us has a duty to question and to challenge, because without such challenges, those proposing uniformity, conformity, and potentially, repression, can dominate and control any system, including education, and any society. Going public allows for discourse to extend ideas, to moderate extremes of views, to adapt and to compromise, to hear many rather than a few voices, and to build real democratic values and societies.

In a recent study, Achinstein and Ogawa (2006) chillingly describe how some US school districts have demanded 'fidelity' to district mandates which implement the 'Open Court' reading program. 'Fidelity' essentially means compliance, with no dissent tolerated and no alternative approach to teaching reading and developing literacy allowed. They describe how every teacher in a district was expected to teach the same program in the
same way at the same time. Two new teachers, both positively evaluated, and achieving excellent student outcomes, argued that Open Court approaches did not meet the needs of their students, and taught reading in ways that in their views did meet student needs. One was fired and the other resigned and moved to a district that did not use Open Court:

Thus teachers who question state-authorized and district-adopted programs are deemed ‘resistant’ and deviant, and are pushed out of the profession or compelled to leave the school. Use of the term fidelity to characterize adherence to the literacy program suggests that dissent is an expression of ‘infidelity’. Instructional policy environments that define professionalism in terms of fidelity and, thus, infidelity, do not leave room for dissent and disagreement (Achinstein & Ogawa, p. 56).

No dissent was tolerated in Nazi Germany, and none was tolerated in some US school districts 60 years after the Nazis were defeated. But the lack of judgment by the many, and their refusal to go into public space with debate or denunciation, allowed for the censure and removal of the two who did exercise judgment. This example demonstrates the relevance of the arguments reflected in Arendt and Habermas’ work. Compliance, and lack of judgment, need not only apply in extreme situations but can, and does, exist in education systems today. That the same education systems which squash dissent may be focusing purely on the means and not the ends of education is surely troubling and problematic.

Conclusion
This literature challenges proponents of an educational approach to consider how the ‘means’, in this case teacher inquiry, contributes to defined ‘ends’ of education. It therefore encourages teacher researchers to consider the connection between their particular inquiry and educational ‘ends’. In some ways it provides a general moral framework rather than some kind of measurement. It promotes debate about what ‘good’ schools might be, and how teacher inquiry might or might not be contributing to the creation of good schools. It also has considerable utility in providing a second frame —
that of understanding the inquiry approach as one way of developing judgment, of moving out of the private spaces of teaching into a somewhat more public space where ideas can be tested. This debate may seem esoteric, but there is sufficient evidence in the literature to make a strong case about the need for better understanding of why moving into more public spaces is a key part of teacher inquiry, yet one that has been under-explored in the literature on inquiry and Action Research. There is also startling evidence that teacher judgment is required now more than ever to counter totalitarian mandates such as those described by Achinstein and Ogawa (2006). Teacher inquiry is well positioned to offer a challenge to such mandates, and challenges may be enhanced if teacher researchers understand how inquiry approaches can build judgment. Challenges from teacher researchers might in such cases counter totalitarian mandates and provide a reasoned case for alternatives, likely linked to meeting the wide range of individual needs that central mandates seem to ignore.

The literature’s more expansive view of educational accountability suggests ends linked to the participation of citizens in a modern democracy, with implications for changing the means of schooling away from standardized test measurements which have no connection to the desired end. In maximizing participation in society, this part of the literature is of particular utility when considering teacher inquiry linked to inclusive educational approaches, which stresses inclusion of all students in schools, and of all citizens in society.
Rationale for considering this area of literature

This study examines teacher inquiry developed and supported as a form of professional development by a teacher union, the BCTF. It is therefore useful to consider what has been written about teacher unions and their focus on professional issues and teachers' professional development. By examining this literature it is possible to consider whether there is sufficient evidence that teacher unions are in fact ambivalent in their focus on professional issues. This consideration of the literature also allows for a consideration of whether teacher inquiry might be an appropriate form of professional development for teacher unions to support. Are there principles or approaches within inquiry that might resonate for unions with interests in teacher autonomy, teacher leadership and collegial discourse? The literature provides some sense of how teacher unions address union support linked to professional issues, and provides one context to link with empirical data collected in this study which provides data about teacher researchers’ views of their union’s professional focus and support:

Teacher unions also can provide leadership. They are ideally situated to sponsor curriculum libraries, ongoing seminars, and teacher work groups. They can also be a forum for teachers to discuss how to address and resist federal and district mandates that negatively impact teaching. Too often teachers rely solely on school districts to design curriculum and strategy workshops, but teacher unions could create their own collaborative communities of study and see their missions as developing an expanded professional capacity and sense of responsibility among their members. Twenty years ago, to cite one example, the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers took another angle on working for teacher quality and initiated a Peer Assistance and Evaluation program in collaboration with the administration (see article p. 30.) (Rethinking Schools on-line. Winter 2005/2006).

In earlier papers (Naylor, 1997, 2001), I explored the range of literature on teacher unions. Little appears to have changed in terms of people still falling within categories of those who despise, critique, or support teacher unions. From the camp of the despisers has emerged more appallingly researched and poorly

3 http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/20_02/edit202.shtml (p. 4)
referenced diatribes. Brimelow (2003) follows in M. Lieberman’s (1997) hyperbolic tradition of telling all in the title but revealing little beyond the cover. Approximately 80 of Brimelow’s 313 references are taken from newspapers or magazines, including the Sacramento Bee and the Billings Gazette, with no references from refereed education journals. None of the recognized academics who write about teacher unions are referenced, unlike authors from a number of “independent” institutes such as the “Pacific Research Institute” (of which Brimelow, coincidentally, is a “senior fellow”). This Institute’s web site describes the organization as a “free market think-tank”, one of several with overt agendas to destroy unions.

This section of the paper examines the recent literature on those who critique and challenge teacher unions, and who focus in part on the issue of teacher union support for teachers’ professional development.

2.7 An Examination of Teacher Unions: Critiques, Supporters, and the Role of Unions in the Support of Professional Development

Meier (2004) argued for the necessity of including teacher unions in more pragmatic and less confrontational working relationships, and countered claims from M. Lieberman and Brimelow that teacher unions blocked reforms:

But the evidence is pretty clear that although unions are a force to be reckoned with, and by nature conservative, especially in defence of basic teacher protections, they have not been a powerful force in preventing school reforms sought by mayors, governors, and local business coalitions – even those that undermine traditional teacher rights.4

Bascia (2000) explored and critiqued the capacity of teacher unions to support teachers’ professional development, outlining three traditions of teacher professional development with which teacher unions have engaged:

... traditional Staff Development, often in workshops delivered to teachers; professional development and the new unionism, conceptually more ambitious and often undertaken in partnership with universities or school districts; organizational involvement as professional development, often informal learning activities which may revolve around an emerging issue in a teacher’s practice or union participation.

4 http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/?article=398
Bascia explores organizational considerations and issues that unions should consider in moving away from the traditional staff development model towards offering richer professional development. Four areas are explored:

- how unions socialize teachers, shape teachers' work and professional development
- which members are attracted to and which are alienated by teacher unions
- how to move beyond a conceptualization of professional development and into considering how union systems and structures enable/constrain teacher learning
- how to commit to multiple professional development strategies.

In later papers, Bascia (2003, 2004) considers several areas as prime foci for teacher unions' professional focus: attracting and retaining teachers, initiating and supporting teachers' professional preparation and on-going learning, and improving teacher quality in a time of systemic reform.

Rodrigue (2000) argues that teacher unions are at a critical point in their evolution. Her exploration of external relevancy suggests that teacher unions, to coin a phrase, “need to get out more”. In other words, they need to be better attuned to external voices and views when building and extending participation in union professional activities, while extending their participation in the educational discourse within a wider community. Rodrigue’s work speaks to the maintaining of teacher-union identity and focus while having the confidence to participate in wider discourse - which might include collaboration and networking.

Leithwood, McAdie, Bascia and Rodrigue (2004) combine the talents and interests of one Canadian province’s union- and university-based authors in a form of collaboration that is publication-oriented, exploring curriculum not from organizational standpoints but from interest in joint exploration of practices and issues. Their publication includes a
chapter by Bascia, Rodrigue, and Moore (2004), which outlines the potential for greater partnerships among faculties of education, teacher unions, school districts, and parents, arguing that in their view there exists a need for the involvement of multiple educational organizations, and that such groups:

...must embark on a continuous, evolving, and dynamic process to work through and beyond narrow, dichotomous thinking, to develop new understandings and new roles. This ‘tapestry’ notion of support for teaching and learning is quite different from the concept of ‘alignment’, top-down control or one-upmanship that has characterized educational policies over the last number of years. This undertaking of educational partnerships requires risk-taking as organizations and positions are de-centred from their traditional dichotomous relationships with each other; it requires patience, and above all an understanding that organizational interaction is a necessary part of ensuring the continuous improvement of teaching (p. 125).

U.S. teacher unions have developed programs and partnerships that support teachers’ professional development (AFT, 2003). The NEA has built partnerships with universities and school districts in support of teacher training and induction, and with the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), to promote staff development programs for experienced teachers, as well as offering on-line professional development. The American Federation of Teachers (2001) prefaced its 2001 report with a definition of a professional union from an earlier (1992) report stating that the AFT was evolving “from a union that has learned to represent our members’ needs for fair rewards and decent working conditions... to a union that is learning to further members’ aspirations for professional growth and empowerment at the workplace” (p. 8).

The AFT argues that a major reason to move towards greater professional support is partly based on analysis of the changing demographics of teaching. Newer teachers, they argue, do not find stories of old struggles edifying or relevant, and they increasingly demand and expect “an organization that focuses intently on their professional needs”
(p. 13). This analysis suggests dichotomous views between younger/newer teachers and those with significant experience, the latter either more supportive or more accepting of teacher unions' priority focusing on bargaining and members' financial and security interests.

In terms of internal union structures, the AFT report indicates lower status within unions for those activists focusing on professional issues, often working with lower budgets and less likely to occupy leadership positions. This reflects a recurring theme within the literature on teacher unions: that budgets, status, and staffing which promote and support professional development do not allow for significant promotion of teacher-led professional development by those unions. The AFT report speaks to the need to examine teacher unions' internal capacity in terms of structures, staffing, and budgets prior to building external collaborations, for there is little purpose in collaborating without the capacity to operate effectively within the collaboration. Examination of internal capacity might also consider the actual utilization of union staff, and whether those ostensibly working in union professional development divisions actually do focus on pro-d, or on the many campaigns or current issues initiated by or dealt with by teacher unions.

Pervading the AFT report are the concepts of networking and collaboration, partly in union-management collaboration but also as one key skill for union leaders who need to:

...learn how to build effective coalitions and partnerships with other groups and agencies having similar goals. The union cannot go it alone. It cannot be responsible for absorbing the costs associated with enhancing members' practice, nor the programs members should have available to them. Union leaders need to be able to develop partnerships and strategic alliances with the district and other organizations, and to work collaboratively to raise funds and develop programs around improved professional practice (p. 15).
Thus the AFT has produced one of many recent reports stressing the need for unions to find and build networks and collaborations. Urbanski (2003) suggested that without teacher union collaboration with school districts, the best management efforts resembled “one hand clapping,” an image hardly intended as attributing success. This range of literature identifying the potential and need for union partnerships and collaborations with external organizations suggests that there may be a limited capacity to engage in such collaborations, and that teacher unions might benefit from accessing both the education and business literatures which explore approaches to collaborations across organizations.

Urbanski and Erskine (2000) described a re-conceptualization of teacher union roles in processes that are solution-oriented and collaborative between union and management. The Teacher Union Research Network (TURN) initiative appears heavily focused on teacher compensation and pay systems rather than on professional development. One major problem with the initiatives described is that they promote reward systems problematic to Canadian teacher unions, namely performance awards and skill-based pay systems. This reflects what may be a significant cultural difference between Canada and the USA, which should be considered by Canadian teacher unions when they are considering or planning collaborations with external agencies. U.S. teacher unions appear to develop, or to accede more readily to, concepts, proposals, and structures that mirror government or employer norms - a situation less common in Canada.

Black (2002) offered a cautious review of Urbanski and the TURN, curiously placing the onus on the unions to deliver on their aim of improving teaching and raising student
achievement. The utility of Black's brief analysis may be to offer a warning to unions not to promise guaranteed ends through the means they suggest - that collaboration, for example, will increase student achievement. Unions can offer collaboration in good faith, but accountability in collaboration should be shared.

Farmelo (2004) and Koppich and Kerchner (2000) also focus primarily on bargaining and contracts, but the latter raise important points about trust and warn that the "virtue of union-management trust, or collaboration for collaboration's sake, has been overstated," especially if such collaboration merely implies civility rather than real progress towards solutions. They indicate that collaboration includes tension and conflict, but that a focus on issues rather than pre-ordained position will assist the collaborating parties.

In summary, the recent literature on the actual and potential roles of teachers unions with a professional focus explores consideration of the changing demographics of the teaching population, teacher unions' internal capacity and resource allocation for a focus on professional issues, and collaboration with external agencies. There may be significant contextual and philosophical differences between Canada and the USA, and between Canadian and U.S. teacher unions, which should also be considered before adopting U.S.-style approaches to supporting the professional work of teachers.

One key question is whether the literature on teacher unions provides enough evidence to consider actual and potential teacher union approaches to supporting teachers' professional development. The concepts of potential support have been stated (Bascia, 1994, 2003, 2004), traditions and past experiences considered (Black, 2002),
collaborations offered as an approach (Naylor, 2001) and some options explored (Naylor, 2004; Rethinking Schools, 2005/06). A case could be made that enough information and analysis exists, but that teacher unions have not fully engaged with the information available, as union support for professional development is so often subsumed as the ‘crises du jour’ – usually bargaining and funding – dominate union agendas. The issue may not be adequate information or analysis but the will of teacher unions to seriously engage in debate and decisions about sustainable teacher union support for teachers’ professional development.

Conclusion

The literature on teacher unions shows that unions are evolving and including a greater rhetorical focus on professional issues. In some cases the rhetorical focus is supported by funding and programs. It remains difficult to state with clarity what many teacher unions’ views on professional issues actually are. They want to appear professionally focused and there is evidence that such focus exists. What is difficult to ascertain is the level of support and commitment, so that while teacher unions espouse professional issues, the question of resourcing begs questions as to the level of support for professional focus when compared to bargaining and campaigns. The literature suggests a range of approaches and models to building professional support, and these might be usefully considered by teacher unions.

Some teacher unions are looking more closely at collaboration with external agencies for reasons which are part economic and part political; teacher unions have limits on funding, and a desire in some cases to find common ground with employers, universities and governments. While one area of the literature attacks teacher unions with marginal and occasionally comical evidence, a wider range explores teacher unions’ evolving roles in
ways that allow teacher unions to consider the changes already made and to consider some possible future directions. The latter literature is of greater utility and is used to inform this study.

What is missing in much of the literature is insider-knowledge of how teacher unions work, with most of the literature written by academics. The emergence of union-employed Canadian researchers (Rodrigue, McAddie, Couture, and Naylor) may allow some critiques to be developed which might mirror the role of 'critical friends' – insiders sympathetic to union goals and approaches but willing and able to analyze union actions in ways that incorporate insider knowledge. However, this could also prove a disadvantage as power and status issues may deter analysis critical of current union actions while still generally supportive of union ethos.
CHAPTER III Research Methods

3.1 Introduction

This study employs a three phase approach to data retrieval, collection and analysis:

**Phase 1**
Document retrieval and analysis from four teacher inquiry projects conducted by the BC Teachers’ Federation with my participation between 1992 and 2002.

**Phase 2**
Data collected and analyzed from the Multiliteracies research project, 2002-2006.

**Phase 3**
Data collected and analyzed from Focus Groups involving participants in the Multiliteracies and Diversity projects, 2006.

In the first two phases, concepts and contexts of collaborative teacher inquiry as professional development are explored and articulated. These concepts and contexts will also be explored by a consideration of the literature in four areas related to the research questions. The four areas of literature are those reviewed in the previous chapter:

- 2.2 & 2.3 Professional Development and Action Research
- 2.4 Networks and Collaborations in Education and Business
- 2.5 Good Teaching and Good Schools; ‘Public’ and ‘Private’ Space in Schools and Society and the Connection of These Areas to Teacher Inquiry and Professional Development
- 2.6 Teacher Unions’ Approaches to Teacher Inquiry and Professional Development

This study is intended to answer the following three research questions:

1. What is the nature of collaborative teacher inquiry that has engaged teachers in BCTF Research projects?
2. How valuable is teacher inquiry in supporting teachers’ learning and professional development?
3. How does collaborative inquiry move teachers into a more public space, and why might that have value for those engaged and for the systems in which they work?

These questions will frame the discussion on the nature and value of teacher inquiry but will also provide a basis for considering how teacher unions or other organizations such as school districts or universities might support teacher inquiry.
The first research question directs the focus of the first two phases of the research. Answering this question through analysis of data derived from the four projects listed above provides a basis for better understanding the various components of collaborative teacher inquiry. By first articulating concepts and approaches, the study is better placed to consider the value of those concepts and approaches. The second and third questions are intended to generate data and analysis which will allow for a consideration of value. The second and third questions are considered in analysis of data collected in Phases 1 and 2 and are also posed as questions in two Focus Groups which was the basis of data collection and analysis in the third phase of the research.

3.2 Data Retrieval, Collection, and Analysis

**Phase 1: Documents retrieved and analyzed from four teacher inquiry projects conducted with my participation between 1992 and 2002**

The four projects reflect a range of teacher inquiry groups which I managed and facilitated between 1992 and 2002 while working in the Research Division of the BC Teachers' Federation. Considering these projects provides the foundation upon which this study is built because data from the projects are used to consider the nature of collaborative teacher inquiry. The four projects, previously described in Chapter One, are:

- Partners for Inclusion, 1992-1994
- Teacher Research – Assessment, 1997
- Fraser-Cascade Teacher Research project, 1999
- Nanaimo-Coquitlam Study, 2002

Documents can provide valuable data in qualitative research (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). They allow for a consideration of events over time, and for a variety of documents to provide diverse data to inform analysis. Scott, J. (1990)
stated that "the four criteria of authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning should not be regarded as distinct stages in assessing the quality of documentary sources." Scott's four criteria provide an approach for the analysis of documents. How representative might documents be? What do they reflect or mean? In this study the retrieval of documents in six categories from four projects (see Table, below) provided a comprehensive range and quantity of data.

Data collection included document retrieval (including draft and final reports, Minutes of meetings, e-mails and other public correspondence, my own journal entries, and field notes). In order to comply with ethical requirements, only public documents are accessed. In some cases a composite document reflecting the content of several private documents has been created to provide a sense of such documents' contents and style. Analysis of these documents analysis provided an understanding of the nature of collaborative inquiry. The Table below documents the data collection in this phase of the research:
### Table 2: 1992-2002 Data collection methods

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Letters/memos</strong></td>
<td>Information to all teachers</td>
<td>Information to all teachers, in BCTF 'Teacher', list-servs etc</td>
<td>General E-mails to researchers</td>
<td>Communications within BCTF and to locals, school districts. Memos to researchers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E-mails to research group</td>
<td>E-mails to research group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agendas/Minutes of meetings</strong></td>
<td>Meeting agendas, notes Memos re data collection</td>
<td>Public Minutes of meetings</td>
<td>No formal Agenda. No Minutes</td>
<td>Agendas and notes from meetings in both districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal BCTF Reports</strong></td>
<td>Communications to BCTF Executive, locals, BCTF staff PSAs Budget documents</td>
<td>Internal e-mails to BCTF Departments – graphics design, printing</td>
<td></td>
<td>Progress reports Information to BCTF Executive, staff Executive motions</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>External organization support/funding</strong></td>
<td>Ministry funding application and documentation</td>
<td>Presentation documentation – universities, school districts</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Field notes</strong></td>
<td>Edits of documents Journal entries File notes retrieved from BCTF Records</td>
<td>Notes from meetings Document edits Notes identifying problems in communication/community-building</td>
<td>Field Notes and edits of draft document</td>
<td>Document edits Personal notes from meetings, discussions, phone calls Methods and Reporting notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final reports</strong></td>
<td>6 hard copy Case Studies Promotional brochures</td>
<td>Hard copy reports</td>
<td>One hard copy book containing group's reports</td>
<td>45 reports published on BCTF web site</td>
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### Data Analysis

Document retrieval was used to inform the first research question concerning the nature of collaborative teacher inquiry. As documents were being retrieved I started to consider what information in the documents might provide some relevant information about the nature of inquiry. Did letters identify components of the approaches used. Did Agendas frame and perhaps control our inquiry in different projects? What was the spirit of a project and was it reflected in e-mail exchanges? While searching for this kind of evidence I also used Scott’s (1990) criteria of authenticity, credibility, representativeness
and meaning. As examples, viewing five e-mails, all of which reflected an amicable, informal level of communication suggested an authentically positive sense of participation. The existence of multiple reports suggested that reporting was typical of projects and therefore one aspect of the inquiry approach during the period of the documents.

The analysis of these documents considered and articulated not only the concepts and contexts that inform approaches to collaborative teacher inquiry that supported professional development but also whether there may have been cumulative learning through the experience of supporting teacher inquiry over the ten years 1992-2002. By considering whether such learning occurred, it is possible to consider whether this learning has informed the inquiry projects conducted between 2002 and 2006.

While this analysis considers my experiences in inquiry projects, it does not articulate certainty or necessarily even confidence that teacher inquiry, and in particular my approach to teacher inquiry, has been unproblematic, or that teacher inquiry is automatically a productive form of professional development.

By including these reflections I place myself within the research, an insider, a participant, using my life experience as one thread of data connecting to other threads in this research, a concept articulated by Denzin, in Huberman and Miles (2002):

A person with a sociological imagination thinks critically, historically, and biographically.... Persons with sociological imaginations self-consciously make their own experience part of their research.... Such a researcher is led to seek out subjects who have experienced the types of experience the researcher seeks to understand. The subject in the interpretive study elaborates and further defines the
problem that organizes the research. Life experiences give greater substance and depth to the problem the researcher wishes to study (p. 350).

Similarly, Van Manen (1990) discussed using personal experiences as a starting point, when suggesting that “My own life experiences are available to me in a way that no-one else’s are” (p. 54).

However, making oneself part of the research holds the perils of selectivity of memory, a consideration discussed by Walcott (1990). Although Walcott referred explicitly to dialogue between informants and researcher, the warning concerning what one hears, or sees, is applicable to any reflection on a research experience when he stated “Many fieldworkers talk too much and listen too little. They become their own worst enemy by becoming their own best informant” (p. 128).

In order to reduce the likelihood of my ‘becoming my own best informant’, methods included document retrieval and analysis (Hodder, 2002), including documents published by participants in the research projects, as well as any notes and Minutes from meetings as outlined in Table 1, above. Analysis of documents were used to inform some of these reflections, but I also wrote from memory of experiences which are documented in the various projects’ texts and reports. As I reviewed the history of and my participation in the collaborative inquiry projects I also looked for commonalities between the projects, and considered whether an evolution has occurred in my experience of teacher inquiry. This form of using existing data for later and secondary analysis has been described by Heaton (2004). Similarly, Jupp and Harris (1993) stated that “it has been proposed that secondary analysis allows researchers to put to new or additional uses data that were originally collected for other research purposes” (p. 8). They also suggested that
"secondary analysis is a research strategy which makes use of pre-existing quantitative
data or pre-existing qualitative research data for the purpose of investigating new
questions or verifying previous studies" (p.18).

In addressing issues of balance between personal memory and document retrieval and
analysis, this study relies primarily on the evidence provided by data rather than
reflection. Personal reflections are included because I participated in the experience of
inquiry, but these reflections are secondary to the empirical data, and are used to
comment on or illuminate the data rather than as primary sources of information.

Letters, Agendas, internal BCTF reports, and communications were analyzed to identify
approaches, structures and processes of inquiry, and to consider whether such approaches
were common or diverse. The method of analysis involved identifying five themes:

- Inquiry approach/philosophy
- Structures
- Processes
- Value
- Moving from private to public space

Codes were developed for each of the themes and the documents were coded.

By coding the documents it became possible to identify and articulate approaches such as
methods of inquiry, open access for BCTF members, rights to withdraw at any time.
Analysis of these documents provided information about structures (regular meeting
times, facilitation, support for writing and publication). Analysis of field notes,
communications between teacher researchers and facilitator (myself), and reports of
inquiry projects, provided data which allowed for a consideration of whether teacher
inquiry was seen by participants as a form of professional development. It also provided
data for a consideration of the shift from private to public spaces, for individuals, groups and the teachers’ union. Thus it became possible to use the documents generated during the four inquiry projects to start answering the three research questions in this study – in terms of the nature of teacher inquiry, its value and whether it moves teachers into more public spaces.

The year 2002 thus became a date where the cumulative experience and learning from four research projects form a benchmark of learning about teacher inquiry. This point in time then provided the basis and the foundation from which a second and more sophisticated approach to teacher inquiry is developed during the Multiliteracies project, discussed below.

**Data collection during the Multiliteracies Research Project, 2002-2006**

The second phase of this research focused on a collaborative inquiry project - Multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996). This Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) - funded project considered what forms of literacy might be necessary to develop and support in a world of rapid economic and social change. Collaborative inquiry approaches taken by one group who were examining the use of Picture Communication Symbols to promote literacy in urban elementary schools will be described and analyzed.

The group of five who collected data for this project jointly decided forms of data collection. The five people involved were two elementary school teachers from two schools, one classroom-based, and the other a Resource teacher supporting Inclusive approaches; two Speech-Language Pathologists who worked in both schools at the time.
of the research study; and myself as the research assistant provided by the University of British Columbia.

One key data collection method involved the video recording of classes (of students whose parents had signed project consent forms) and meetings involving the five members of the research team. The classes were recorded in order that the whole team could observe and reflect on the use of Picture Communication Symbols in the classes. Video tapes were viewed using I-Movie, with notes and codes linked to each clip using Microsoft ‘Word’ (Spiers, 2004). Spiers has outlined this simple method which proved an effective and simple approach to data analysis. Codes for the videos of classes were developed linked to the three areas of focus (classroom management, literacy and expressive communication). These codes identified segments of data that facilitated a focus on each of the areas. Additional codes were developed to identify which students used Picture Symbols, to what extent and for which of the three areas. Notes linked to codes or segments of video were initially descriptive but increasingly analytic. In one example, it was noted that a student regularly walked across the classroom to check the day’s visual schedule. This was linked to classroom management because he self-referenced the schedule (in picture symbols) but additional notes stated that he was an ESL student with limited English proficiency, leading to analysis and discussion that the symbols supported ESL students as well as those students with special needs.

In the video data of meetings, such observations were unnecessary, as the only data used from these videos were the comments of participants transcribed and analyzed using ATLAS software. (The use of video was partly for the benefit of the team in reviewing
the data, and partly in case we wanted to use the videos to share our ideas and approaches with other teachers or researchers.) Patterns and themes were identified from these data (Huberman & Miles, 2002) and linked to the key questions of the research study. As examples, each of the five participant’s comments were coded (T1, T2, T3, T4, M) to identify the speaker, ‘T’ identifying the teachers, and ‘M’ the moderator (myself), with codes developed for areas such as professional development, isolation, conversation, and students’ learning.

The codes used in the classroom tapes were also used to link data to the three areas of focus: classroom management, literacy, and expressive communication. Additional codes identified positive or negative perceptions of participants. Most transcribed sections of data therefore were coded in multiple ways. The number of times that data linked to individual codes was counted as one measure of significance. For example, there were many positive and no negative perceptions about the conversations, indicating that the experience of conversation within the group was positive. Other codes linked to the conversations data were developed (e.g. one code for ‘extension’ and another for ‘challenge’) enabled us to see and analyze the data in ways that helped us to understand how perspectives were extended or challenged during the conversations.

The settings in which data were collected included classrooms (with and without students), school libraries, Principals’ offices, union meeting rooms, and local teacher association offices. In considering the range of data collected over a four-year period, including 18 hours of videotape, it is clear that the actions and perspectives of the four participants form the major proportion of the data collection. This ensures that one area
of concern - potential over-use of selective data from myself - is addressed. Multiple discussions were videotaped. In some cases discussions focused on the use of Picture Communication Symbols. In others, participants focused on and discussed the process of teacher inquiry, whether this constituted a form of professional development, and if it was of utility and value to them and to their students.

Empirical data from this study collected over a four-year period include field notes from classroom observations, in which several members of the group observed the application of Picture Communication Symbols in teaching. Videotapes of the research group’s meetings which focused on reflections about the previously-filmed classroom utilization, also formed a major source of data collection. Notes were taken during the 18-drafts of the group’s research report over a period of one year, and e-mail communications accompanied the drafts as they moved through the group, providing additional data. Hand-written or videotaped records of conversations were often made, sometimes being added to the e-mail correspondence. Thus, these data combined the four ‘insider’ (teacher) voices as well as that of the ‘outsider (myself as researcher). The inside-outside issue becomes somewhat blurred during the Multiliteracies project - while we were a collaborative group, in some ways I was the outsider, being the only member of the group not interacting with students, and only ever in schools as a researcher.

A Case Study which documented the group’s approach to teacher inquiry as well as its exploration of Picture Communication Symbols was produced, based on the above data. The Case Study illustrated both the initial focus of the group’s inquiry, the context of the schools in which they work, and the group’s changing areas of focus, so that the Case
becomes an illustration and analysis of the inquiry process as much as it explores the particular practices relevant to the application of Picture Communication Symbols, much as described by Gall, Borg and Gall. (1996) who argued that “A Case Study is done to shed light on a phenomenon, which is the processes, events, persons or things of interest to the researcher.... A Case is a particular instance of the phenomenon” (p. 545).

The Case Study evolved with the dual focus - on Picture Communication Symbols and on the nature of teacher inquiry - because data showed that this dual focus became important for the group. Their initial focus on the approach to using the symbols in classrooms was maintained but matched by the emerging interest in considering their experiences in the particular form of teacher inquiry they were experiencing.

McMillan (2000) has argued that if the primary purpose of a Case Study is to obtain a detailed description and gain an understanding of the case, generalizability of the case is a concern. However, the use of Case Study in this research is not to attempt any form of generalizability, but, as stated above, to shed light on the group’s approach to inquiry and through a detailed description to gain a better understanding. This research is focused on better understanding concepts and contexts of teacher inquiry, so the method of using one Case as part of the data collection is appropriate, using one particular experience of inquiry to consider both concepts and contexts. Were this the only source of data, it would limit the research. But the other sources of data (empirical data on ten years’ inquiry projects and two Focus Groups) extend the scope of data collection and allow for a more comprehensive analysis to occur.
Thus, multiple sources of data were used to document and analyze the evolution of the inquiry, starting with the four BCTF Research projects between 1992 and 2002, and followed by analysis of the Multiliteracies inquiry group which was active between 2002 and 2006. While these data cover a fourteen-year period, both 2002 and 2006 reflect points in time, in which benchmarks of understanding were reached. The inquiry approaches of the 1992-2002 period led to a greater understanding of teacher inquiry. The Multiliteracies project built on the understanding and capacity generated in the earlier projects, expanded the areas of collaboration and generated further understanding of inquiry approaches beyond those articulated in 2002.

**Data collection from participants in the Multiliteracies and Diversity Projects, 2006**

During this phase, Focus Groups were conducted with participants from the Multiliteracies project, and from a second collaborative project (the ‘Teaching to Diversity’ project) involving teachers from three school districts. Participants in the Diversity project from whom data were collected were ten teachers from three school districts (School District # 43, Coquitlam, School District # 68, Nanaimo, and School District # 57, Prince George). These teachers had all acted in facilitative roles to inquiry groups in their districts.

This second project is included in order to widen the 2006 data sources to two inquiry groups, both of which had conducted inquiry over the same time period of 2002-2006. Reviewing the conversations from occasional videoconferences linking the three Diversity inquiry groups, led to a tentative understanding that some similarities in perspectives on inquiry appeared to be developing between two different and unconnected groups. Both, for example, had spoken of the value they saw in conversations with peers, and about the utility of regular meetings with some facilitation
and support. If some similarities appeared to be emerging, then collecting and analyzing data from this second teacher inquiry approach would allow for a consideration of whether these similarities were real and could be identified. Conversely, using the second group enabled identification of differences between the groups, should these be occurring. Just as the four (1992-2002) inquiry projects provided data across inquiry groups, so the addition of the Diversity group at this stage of data collection allowed for more breadth and depth on data collection and analysis.

Kreuger (1988) documented the 1930s origins of Focus Group interview techniques as a tool developed by social scientists who were seeking ways to improve on data collection approaches. Focus Groups have been used in at least four areas identified by Morgan (1998): academic research, product marketing, evaluation research, and quality improvement. Thus, the method has both an academic research utility and a use in testing consumer reactions to products and services. Its use for gathering qualitative data is experiencing renewed popularity worldwide (Walden, 2006). The purpose of Focus Groups differs from individual interviews because it incorporates interactions between members of the group – identified by Kitzinger (1994) as ‘synergy’. Merton, Fiske and Kendall (1990) stated that focus groups “will yield a more diversified array of responses” (p. 135) than one-on-one interviews. It was both the synergy and the diversity of views that made this method of collecting data appropriate for the 2006 data collection stage of the study. It also allowed for a continuation of the forms of discussion already experienced by the two groups that would constitute the Focus Groups – free-flowing, extending ideas and offering challenges. With the research questions providing the focus for discussion, data was collected in two Focus Groups, each of which lasted between
two and three hours. Data was therefore collected from the two groups in 2006, using the same questions to generate the type of discussion that had been common to both projects, but also ranging beyond or expanding the initial areas of focus.

Barbour and Schostak, in Somekh and Lewin, (2005) suggested that ‘there are ways of thinking through design that evoke rather than impose on the realities of people’s experience’ (p. 44). My purpose was to evoke through a design which posed general questions, but allowed for a conversation directed by the participants in semi-structured discussions. This was described by Lichtman (2006), who suggested semi-structured or guided focus group. In such a group, the researcher develops a list of questions with a plan for proceeding, but uses this as a guide, and is willing to adapt so that the group can direct the directions of the conversation rather than be bound by the questions alone.

The next step for our Focus Group data collection was to record and transcribe the data, which was then formatted to make it ready for analysis, using ATLAS software for qualitative data analysis. Vaughn, Schumm and Sinagub (1996) argued for finding the ‘big ideas’ from multiple data sources (p. 103) in Focus Groups rather than forming a reliance on counting the number of times something is said. This contradicts Huberman and Miles (1982) assertion that counting reflects the dominance of a given type of statement. In my analysis, both were used. Often the number of times a statement or term appears reflects its importance in the view of the people using the term, yet some form of reflection appears warranted to consider whether frequency equates to significance. Key patterns and themes were identified and discussed (Miles & Huberman, 1987), through the use of ATLAS qualitative data analysis software. Miles and Huberman argued that
pattern coding had four important functions, three of which are connected to methods used in this study:

1. It reduces large amounts of data into a smaller number of analytic units
2. It gets the researcher into analysis during data collection, so that later data collection can be more focused
3. It helps the researcher build a cognitive map, an evolving schema for understanding what is happening locally (p. 68).

All of these were relevant to this study. Coding allowed for examination of data within a coded area (e.g. ‘conversation’) because ATLAS groups all the data within one coded area, creating a smaller analytic unit. Reading all the text where ‘conversation’ was mentioned created an understanding that it was important (measured by how many times it was mentioned, and whether comments were positive or negative) and what was happening within the conversations (codes on ‘extension’ or ‘challenge’). From such understanding tentative themes could be developed: conversation as important to participants because it extends thinking, or conversation taking participants out of isolation and into more collaborative and public spaces.

The ‘Teaching to Diversity’ project relevant to this research started to address the issue arising from experienced Special Education, Learning Assistance and ESL teachers leaving the role, and opting for classroom placements. This occurred at a time when approximately 18% of jobs in Special Education were cut, resulting in heavy workloads for those remaining. Special Education positions were occupied in many cases by inexperienced teachers for whom the resource teaching position was often their first teaching role. Within the ‘Teaching to Diversity’ project, I approached three school

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5 I will use the general term ‘resource teachers’ to refer to those teachers covering either or all of Special education, Learning Assistance, and ESL.
districts (Coquitlam, Nanaimo and Prince George) and the teacher associations in those districts, to support a project mentoring new resource teachers. All supported the idea with time and with money. The project involved up to ten new resource teachers participating in an inquiry group, reflecting on practice. Groups were co-facilitated by two facilitators in each group who had received training in group mentoring processes and inquiry approaches from the BCTF.

By 2006, some documentation had occurred and was published on the BCTF website, and some discussions about the inquiry groups had occurred through meetings in Vancouver and through videoconferencing. Many of the themes that emerged during the Multiliteracies project were mirrored in the ‘Teaching to Diversity’ project— the positive views of participants about inquiry processes as a form of professional development; the power of conversation; moving from isolation to collaboration. Data from this project was collected in the form of field notes, records of meetings in three school districts and at the BCTF, and transcriptions of videoconferences.

There was no systematic analysis of data from the Diversity project. Similar themes seemed to be emerging from the Diversity group as were emerging from the Multiliteracies picture symbols group. These themes were identified from reviewing videoconference data, and from field notes taken during the project. While there were substantial amounts of data from the Multiliteracies project, there was a sense that some similar views were being expressed by participants in the Diversity teams, particularly in the areas of the utility of teacher inquiry as professional development, the value of

http://bctf.ca/TeachingToDiversity/BC-projects.html
collaboration and conversation with peers, and the strong connections between the inquiry and a sense that the process helped participants better meet students’ needs. It seemed that there might be utility in posing the same questions to both groups (Multiliteracies and Diversity). Ten teachers from the Diversity teams were asked to reflect on the same questions (see page 220 in this paper) that would be posed to the Multiliteracies participants. This offered an opportunity to find similarities and differences between two forms of inquiry groups, and to provide a form of triangulation linking the 2006 analysis with data collected since 1992.

**Research Methods: Summary**

Empirical data were collected and analyzed for the period between 1992 and 2002 in which four BCTF research projects involving teachers are used as sources of data. Multiple data collection sources have been identified in Table 1, above. One inquiry project (Multiliteracies) then provided a focus for data collection and reflection on approaches to teacher inquiry over a four-year period between 2002 and 2006. The intent and purpose was to explore contexts, issues and themes connected to collaborative teacher inquiry generated through field notes, classroom observations, video-taped classes and research group meetings and e-mails documenting participant discussions. A Case Study was produced to describe the Multiliteracies inquiry approach. Reflections on the ‘Teaching to Diversity’ project suggested that participants in this project appeared to have similar perceptions to the Multiliteracies group about their experiences in and the value of inquiry. Data was then collected in two Focus Groups in 2006 (Multiliteracies and Diversity groups) the data from which was transcribed, then analyzed using ATLAS qualitative data analysis software, with key patterns and themes identified and discussed. In this analysis, codes provided a way to build the smaller analytic units (Miles &
Huberman, 1983) linked to the research questions or to emerging themes that might lead
to extensions of thinking. Examples of this could include the importance of conversation
or the shift of organizations like the union into different forms of public space than
previously considered in the literature.

The study therefore incorporates a range of methods including introductory personal
reflections, together with more extensive empirical data collection (document retrieval
and analysis), videotape analysis etc., Case Study, Focus Groups. These methods are
applied to a consideration of four BCTF research projects and two BCTF collaborations
with school districts and a university. All the data are considered in relation to the key
questions guiding this research in order to better understand concepts and contexts of
teacher inquiry but also to consider implications for organizations such as teacher unions
and school districts who may wish to support teacher inquiry, or who may wish to reflect
on existing support through the findings of this study.

3.3 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies partly in providing answers to the three research
questions, but also linking what to date have been disparate areas of literature, and
building a case that each contributes to informing approaches to teacher inquiry. As an
example, the study connects the somewhat separate literatures on professional
development and teacher inquiry. In addition to linkage, one new area of literature
(networks in business) is connected to teacher inquiry.

In considering the value and potential utility of teacher inquiry, this study links empirical
data to the literature on inquiry and Action Research while questioning whether much of
this literature may have become insular and unconnected to literature on collaboration and networking. It considered the utility and potential of teachers moving their inquiry approaches into more public spaces with colleagues, other educators, policy-makers, parents and communities. It asks whether such approaches develop individual teacher learning, or connect in any way to student learning. By engaging in these explorations, the research contributes to discussions concerning the efficacy of inquiry groups, and links this discussion to their development of, and impact on, public education systems. It does this by considering whether a more public discourse can be one part of developing good schools, and might offer better ways of engaging educators and community in discussions about public education to develop teachers’ learning, while potentially building improved communication between educators and community.

By articulating the nature of collaborative inquiry, this study builds an understanding of such an approach from inquiry groups’ experiences over time. This differs from much of the literature that often fails to build on the particular and sustained experiences of actual teacher inquiry undertaken by teachers. In discussing the nature of inquiry, some new approaches have been identified, such as the statement of a claim by an inquiry group which forms the focus of their inquiry. Other areas discussed in existing literatures have been extended in this study, in particular how conversation builds understanding, and in the connections between teacher inquiry and teachers moving from private to public spaces.

Another area of significance involves the focus on organizational roles and capacity. While the study focuses most on the role of the teacher union, it also offers analysis on how other organizations, especially, school districts and universities, might better
understand and build collaborations and partnerships linked to teacher inquiry, and why they should bother to do so. In exploring such collaborations, the research will contribute to a body of literature identifying networking and collaborations as concepts growing in importance in education, government and business environments, and link these to discussions about schooling in the future. Teacher unions have rarely considered their potential place in debates about the future of education. This research is therefore significant because it may allow at least one teacher union to position itself as a participant in debates about the future of schooling where they are currently underrepresented.

By engaging in a wider discourse within the union, and between the union and other organizations, the research aims not only to engage audiences in discourse, including those working in universities and school districts, but to enable teachers and teacher unions to influence the discourse taking place. This aim, if achieved, would reflect a significant evolution in teacher and union capacity. The BCTF’s current influence on the BC education system is largely through its industrial capacity and the collective actions of over 40,000 teachers. By building on the intellectual capacity of its members through enhanced professional focus, the union can become a more significant participant in debate on educational issues and practices. Or, as Giroux (1988), referencing Scheffler (1968) stated:

> By viewing teachers as intellectuals, we can illuminate the important idea that all human activity involves some form of thinking. No activity, regardless of how routinized it might become, can be abstracted from the functioning of the mind in some capacity. This is a crucial issue, because by arguing that the use of the mind is a general part of all human activity we dignify the human capacity for integrating thinking and practice, and in doing so highlight the core of what it means to view teachers as reflective practitioners. Within this discourse, teachers can be seen not merely as “performers professionally equipped to realize...
effectively any goals that may be set for them. Rather (they should) be viewed as free men and women with a special dedication to the values of the intellect and the enhancement of the critical powers of the young” (Giroux, 1988, p. 125).

Building on teachers’ intellectual capacity to influence educational policy might be a long-term union goal, but would benefit the union in ways that its industrial focus cannot, in part because it enhances and makes public a union focus on what the ends of education are - creating good schools to enhance the values and norms of democratic societies - as well as the means of meeting the needs of students, in part by focusing on inquiry approaches which improve teachers’ capacity to teach. The study will also argue a case in its conclusions for a different form of strategic thinking, including cross-organizational advocacy and the increased use of ‘critical friends’ and collaborating organizations to pressure for educational change reflecting those particular experiences in schools rather than imposed and uniform change from a central provincial body.

Including my personal history and involvement in teacher inquiry, as well as my experience as an employee of a teacher union, is significant for two reasons. First, it allows for a form of triangulation in which the findings from the literature and from the empirical study are compared with reflections over twenty years of experience in teacher inquiry projects. Second, it offers a perspective to inquiry, collaboration and teacher unions from a person inside all three approaches/contexts. Such a perspective may have its limits and potential drawbacks, including personal bias and selectivity of memory, yet it seems pointless to collect only data and perspectives from others when inquiry and collaboration have been a major focus of my life’s work.
The research is significant in that it considers whether change and improvement in BC's education system might be achieved by better understanding concepts and approaches to teacher inquiry. This research aims to develop both vision and approaches which might form a foundation for the re-formation of teacher union approaches to supporting teachers' professional development, while also offering useful analyses to school districts and universities considering collaborative approaches to inquiry and professional development. But it also addresses more strategic questions of whether such collaborations might result in alliances involving school districts, unions and universities to move beyond research to advocacy for change based on collaborative teacher inquiry.

This study asks whether, by moving teaching into a more public space through collaborative inquiry, teacher inquiry might challenge centralized, top-down mandates by building more democratic forums for discourse about education. Such discourse might set agendas for debate which involve practitioners, parents and policy-makers in forums to shape educational policy rather than it being imposed on practitioners and school systems. Policy might then emerge from informed practice rather than being imposed by mandates. However, such a challenge remains only a very tentative and somewhat unlikely possibility at this stage. Whether moving from private to public through sharing and debating inquiry approaches might in theory challenge centralized, top-down mandates does not mean that such systems will be changed. Any challenge will depend on both the strength of the informed debate, and on the effectiveness of strategies to shift systems. While the strength of the informed debate will be considered based on the literature and the data generated in this research, the strategy for shifting educational systems policy development will be more conjectural, a possibility to be considered by
those practitioners and organizations in education systems, and an option for policymakers to consider developing policy in very different ways.

These represent areas of significance that link to the three research questions. It is also possible that some areas emerge from the data which are not identifiable at this stage, or that the study provides some grounds for speculation, some imagining of possibilities not yet supported by evidence but perhaps areas of focus where evidence may be collected in the future.

### Research Timeline

**Phase 1 (1992-2002):** Collection, review and analysis of data from four BCTF research projects

**Phase 2 (2002-2006):**
- Data collection and on-going analysis, Multiliteracies project (Phase 1)
- Focus Group data collection (2006)

**Phase 3 (September, 2006):** Analysis of Focus Group data

### 3.4 Teacher Inquiry: Four BCTF Projects, 1992-2002

The following four projects reflect a ten-year span of collaborative teacher inquiry projects initiated and funded by the BCTF. I worked in each project as the project manager, but all the projects were shaped and influenced by those teachers who participated in them.

**Partners for inclusion, 1992-1994**

The issue of 'Inclusion' has been of interest and concern to teachers in BC since an inclusive policy was adopted by the BC education system in the 1980s. Teachers are philosophically supportive of the need to respect all human rights and to include all students in public schools – an assertion backed by various surveys of teachers (Naylor,
2002). However, with minimal pre-service or in-service training, and with what is often perceived as limited support, teachers have expressed strong concern about the lack of supports for the implementation of the philosophy.

By addressing the issue of inclusion in this project, the union connects its research to notions of 'good' education which includes all students. The inquiry is not challenging or questioning the concept of inclusion, but seeking to better understand the 'means' of inclusive approaches to build the 'end' of more inclusive schools and society.

1992 was a very different era in BC education when compared to 2006. In particular, relations between the provincial government and the BCTF were such that the government regularly funded a number of BCTF projects, whereas in recent years the government has refused any funding for BCTF projects. A letter to the BCTF from the deputy Minister of Education, dated May 25, 1992, stated:

The Ministry is pleased that the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation has an interest in addressing the challenges of mainstreaming/integration of students with special needs. I will make every effort to involve the Federation in a collaborative way with other partners in the process.

The tone and content of this letter indicates a more collaborative and open approach from government in terms of including the union and other educational partners in research activities. In the years since the Liberal government came to power in BC, all major stakeholders except the BCTF have been the recipients of government grants.

While planning for the 'Partners for Inclusion' started before any contact with the Ministry over possible funding, a grant of $25,000 was provided by the Ministry to support this teacher-led research. The contract between the BCTF and the Ministry of Education was signed on October 28, 1993 (Information retrieved from BCTF Records).
The BCTF’s ‘Partners for Inclusion’ project aimed to build a teacher inquiry approach to documenting and reflecting on ‘good practices’ in BC elementary and secondary schools in urban and rural areas. ‘Good practice’ was considered different to ‘best practice’. As a collaborative group, the teachers and myself decided that we would identify and describe some approaches that seemed to work in a series of Case Studies – good practice, while we considered ‘best practice’ to be somewhat illusory and likely prescriptive. We wanted to reflect the reality of schools attempting to be inclusive, doing what we considered a good job, and to show what this looked like so that others could emulate, adapt or debate the practices and approaches being described.

Information on this project was sent to all local Presidents of BC teacher associations and to the Special Education Association (SEA) and Learning Assistance Teachers Association (LATA), both Provincial Specialist Associations of the BCTF. The letter to locals and SEA Presidents stated:

The Case Studies will focus on inclusionary teaching. Teachers will be seconded for up to ten days between January and March 1993. These may be resource teachers with specialist’s knowledge of inclusionary practices and/or classroom teachers who are implementing inclusion. One teacher will be from the site of the school identified as demonstrating good practice, and will be considered a proponent. That teacher will work with another teacher from a different school who will be considered the Case writer. Training, facilitation and coordination of the research will be provided by staff in the BCTF Research and Technology Division (Retrieved from BCTF Records).

The above document reflects the collaborative focus of the project, pairing teachers as ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ to a school. Release time is provided and paid by the union. It also clearly states that the end product will be a Case Study, written by the researchers, with support and training from the BCTF. Thus, some of the frame and structure of the BCTF’s research projects were being established in this approach. It also moves the
inquiry into more public space by building in collaboration between one researcher inside
the school and the other from outside. The ‘inside’ story is therefore exposed to a ‘critical
friend in a way that encourages discourse. A further intent was to generate clarity – if
practices could be explained to a teacher outside the school, then such explanation, when
published, might also be better understood by other teachers. The process was designed
to engage teachers in learning through dialogue within the team and with others in the
school. Data collection, with its questioning and probing, observation and document
retrieval, involved constant interactions and discussions with school staff, a process that
reflects inquiry as professional development. By focusing on practices in one school, the
researchers’ own practices inform reflections, and provide a basis for comparisons.

In a document supporting the BCTF’s application for Ministry funding, the union’s
approach to the research was discussed:

The Case Study project will describe good inclusionary practices. While there
exists some evidence in the current literature concerning the identification of what
constitutes good practices, there is little description of such practices that teachers
and administrators might utilize to improve Inclusion. The Case Study project is
designed to provide a more detailed description of such practices. The Research Division of the BCTF will examine the current literature to
ascertain potential areas of data collection, while encouraging a methodology
allowing for new findings which may not be described in existing literature. From
our most recent analysis of the most current literature we expect the following
areas to be addressed: school and district policies; school organization; classroom
practices and pedagogy; the nature of effective collaboration and the workings of
the school-based team; union contracts; and transitions from elementary to
secondary schools.

Teams of teacher researchers will be selected to collaboratively collect data,
analyze and report findings. The teams will be actively facilitated by the BCTF
Research Division throughout the study, so that teachers’ efforts to collect and
analyze data will be supported. After the selection of the teacher researchers, the
BCTF will provide a one-day training session in Case Study methodology, and
will undertake to publish the Case Studies (Document retrieved from BCTF
Records).
What this communication reflected was the intent of the BCTF Research Division to access and use current literature on Inclusion to support its research approach. This was considered important in our search for external funding, in order to provide transparency about our methods to external agencies, and to encourage our teacher-researchers to consider connections between current literature and the issues they addressed in schools. Our approach to union research was therefore a combination of developing a partnership between practitioners in schools and researchers at the BCTF, building collaborative approaches, providing facilitation and support, and ensuring publication and dissemination of reports.

Ten teachers were involved, working in teams of two or three. A teacher who worked in a school where a case was to be written worked with a teacher who was teaching elsewhere, to collect data, analyze the data, and write a report. We collectively developed data collection approaches, after which the teams set off to their sites to collect data, with some release time provided by the union. We met regularly to share and discuss data collection approaches. Interview techniques were honed, with the researchers building probing and extending techniques. Observation skills were developed, and document retrieval (of forms and materials which explained processes in schools) included as data collection after we understood how such documents supported understanding of practices and systems used in schools. One of the ways that I helped the researchers who were going into schools involved preparing notes on approaches to data collection. One such note is shown below:

**Methods of data collection:**

1. **Interviews:**
2. Observation

- With teachers, key informants
- Individual/group
- Using data for the school as a basis for discussion
- Always inform the person that their names will not be used
- Tell them about why we’re doing the project
- Take lots of notes
- Be aware of the use of the probing question - “That’s interesting, tell me a little more about...”
- Never be afraid to go back to a topic
- Ask for any documents that may explain a process (school-based team approach etc.)

2. Observation

- Ask for a tour of the school - keep interested and ask lots of questions
- Sit for a while in a class and take a few notes - check on details with the teacher afterwards. Observation can be a very good start to a discussion. “I noticed you did X and Y - tell me some more about how you do that and why.”
- Look at Notice Boards, resource documents

3. Documentary evidence

- Keep asking for documents - people who use them all the time forget they are around - ask if they are available electronically
- Teachers in a school may be open to writing some of their thoughts on what is going on in any particular issue - if they can do this electronically, and e-mail it to you, it’s better than having hard copy
- Photographs/sketches. Please note that for any photos of students we need parental permission to use them - I can send you a permission slip if this is necessary
- Some documentary data will also be used a spur to discussion - the 1701 data, for example. Look at any available documents and see if you have questions around the document or the practice/process it reflects

The idea of the Case Study is to have a general idea of the school and how it includes students with special needs. Not all will include all the same information, so feel free to adapt the content and approach to your school Case Study (Retrieved from project files).

The above document reflects research-in-progress. Meetings allowed us to generate ideas for data collection, to look at accepted methods, and to find ways to encourage teacher-
researchers to become more adept at finding and processing information. My assumption was that my knowledge of research methods combined with teachers' knowledge of practice could be combined to develop a powerful practitioner approach to research. But for that to work, methods required understanding, discussion, application and reflection. This memo, sent after a meeting, synthesized key areas of data collection in a way that served both as an organizer and as a reference. It also asks for evidence, of various kinds, and from a variety of sources.

This document was used as a reference by the teacher-researchers as they collected data, but it was also accompanied by many discussions, some involving the whole project team, others involving myself and one or two teacher-researchers. Such discussions extended teachers' skills in data collection, in particular the use of the probing question in interviews. At the start of the project, the researchers would ask a question and be satisfied with whatever answer was offered. But gradually they started to say, "Tell me more about that." Or, "I'm not sure what you mean - can you explain that a little more?" Such probes reflected both increased confidence in the researchers but also a more sophisticated knowledge of interview approaches in qualitative data collection. They started to encourage respondents to offer more detail, to provide documents that were used, and to reflect on the approaches being described.

In some ways, these Cases were forms of appreciative inquiry, looking for and describing what worked well in schools without pretending or claiming that the described practices were perfect. The teacher researchers engaged in extensive and stimulating discussions at school sites and within the collaborative group of researchers across sites. As they started
to write their Cases, each group of writers found a different style and rhythm while each produced a Case reflecting good inclusionary practices in a recognizable school setting. None of the teachers was left to write without support - I assisted with drafting and editing as requested or as necessary. Our sense was that the reports provided a focus for the inquiry, and for our discussions about what good practices might be. The following was a typical communication from me to one of the teacher researchers, partly applying pressure and direction, partly offering encouragement. This is a composite message compiled of segments from two different messages, intended to convey the content and spirit of the type of communication from me to individuals in the inquiry group:

Hi, ******.

I have gone through your draft, and suggested where we may need more detail. It’s a good start and can easily be built on. The main problem is that statements are too generalized, with not enough details to give a sense of what is happening. The other thing we are really trying to discover is whether things are any different or not this school year. How hard is it to meet students’ needs now, with the available staff, compared to previous years? How much harder is the job of the specialist support teacher? Try to get both more detail, and more specifics about this year, in your report.

The section on paperwork was great!

See if my comments and suggestions help, and DON’T WORRY - we will get it right!

Cheers,

Charlie

(E-mail message retrieved from project files).

This communication likely typifies many of the exchanges from myself to teacher researchers: informal and friendly, encouraging but also pushing for quality and detail in the teachers’ writing. My intention during this and every other project was to ensure publications occurred but that no teacher was left alone or left to struggle with writing the report.
Reflecting back in 2006, I wonder if this was teacher inquiry - certainly it was not Action Research, rather it was a qualitative methods approach producing Case Studies. Yet I believe that this approach reflected one form of collaborative teacher inquiry, stressing collaboration within and across research groups. We explored practices within a number of schools, the ‘outside’ researcher acting as the critical friend to the ‘inside’ researcher, probing with questions and entering into dialogue about practices in the school being studied. In some ways I acted as ‘outsider’ to the whole research group while also offering support and critiques as ‘critical friend’. I was an outsider for several reasons, one being that I was not a practising teacher in a BC school. I was also controlling and managing, as well as facilitating. I needed to ensure that cases were written, and that they were of a quality ready for publication. This meant some level of authority and control, whether benign or otherwise. I wonder whether facilitation and control coexist in all such projects, and what the boundaries and limits of each might be. I had some control, but the teachers had in many ways more authority. They had the right to leave at any time, to reject editing suggestions, even, should the need arise, to complain to those in authority over me within the union. Yet none did leave, and editing progressed with spirited and friendly debate, and there were no complaints (or none that I heard of!) to my organization. I saw skilled, committed and highly professional teachers with exciting approaches to including all students in learning, while I think that they developed some respect for my role in initiating the project, bringing methodological knowledge to the project, and for giving them the sense that collectively we could make it happen.
The many rich conversations in our meetings informed reflections. Occasional disagreements brought differences in style and methods into focus, while the aim of producing Case Studies provided us with the focus of a 'product' for the inquiry taking place. Thus the project gave all participants the opportunity to gauge and build both respect for others in the group and to construct approaches to inquiry. The discussions within the research group provided one form of professional development because they were examples of collegial and reflective discourse. Both respect and approaches were linked to the inclusionary concepts being explored, and to the 'products' of written and published Case Studies, so there was a practical and tangible focus for the discourse taking place. While the process proved effective and productive, there were differences in views and approach, with some compromises and diplomacy needed by everyone at some stage. Because there was a defined end-product, the written Case Studies, I think that there also existed some sense that the end was more crucial than the means. While I hoped that teachers enjoyed and benefited professionally from the experience, our primary and collective goal was to publish Case Studies for the use of teachers and other educators in the BC public school system.

Six Case Studies were published, most around 100-120 pages. Many drafts were made of each Case, with teachers writing, and my role to edit and share some drafting if any blocks occurred and if requested by the teachers. Final decisions on content rested with the teachers. Once content was finalized, BCTF proof readers edited for style. Then the reports were sent to the BCTF Graphics Department, where graphic designers used desktop publishing tools to ready the texts for hard-copy publication. Finally the Production department arranged printing, and distributed copies to all BCTF local teacher association
offices, to Provincial Specialist Associations, and to the school districts where the research occurred. After initial distribution was completed, the BCTF Lesson Aids Department listed the publications in its hard copy (and now on-line) catalogue, so they could be purchased at cost.

In considering two of the six reports produced, there are some similarities and differences in data collection. The ‘Partners for Inclusion: Windsor Secondary School’ study (1994) outlines the approach to data collection taken by the site proponent and the site writer:

The study was conducted between February and April, 1993. It includes interviews with the Coordinator of Student Services, the Secondary resource Team, the Principal, a Learning Development resource teacher, two students and the President of the North Vancouver Teachers’ Association. In addition there were three observations of mainstream subject classes and numerous visits to the learning centre by the case writer, a teacher from a different metropolitan school district. This paper looks at the evolution of Windsor’s program: how it currently operates, the key factors which have led to its success, and obstacles which still need to be addressed (p. 7).

As mentioned earlier, the two-person team combined the insider knowledge and skills of the site proponent with the outside and possibly more neutral focus of the case writer from a different district. The combination of insider-outsider was designed to stimulate debate and reflection on the programs and approaches being described. This debate continued through to publication, when the ‘inside’ teacher, along with several colleagues from the school, offered their comments and reactions to each chapter. In the section addressing relationships and collaborations, the ‘inside’ researcher states:

The fact that we openly acknowledge our collaborative relationship (with Teacher Assistants - TAs) beckons others to join in; most notably, our TAs are encouraged to voice opinions and to make suggestions. Although our TAs recognize where the ultimate responsibility lies, they display no reticence in supplying often-useful input (Partners for Inclusion: Windsor Secondary, p. 37).
After the ‘outside’ teacher researcher had collected data and written about school climate and attitudes, the ‘insider’ comment added:

The student body responds very well to dialogue based on their experiences in inclusionary classrooms. The mainstream students who have had positive experiences in such classrooms become the arbiters of peer group opinion. Increasing the number of this type of mainstream student is the task of the entire school community. To this end, we should not be afraid to debate any negative issues arising from negative inclusion, not simply among ourselves as educators, but among the students and parents in our school communities as well (provided, of course, that the discussion constitutes no threat to confidentiality (p. 53). Such a comment is not merely adding one perspective but using the inquiry approach to succinctly place an issue in the reader’s mind, where it might be considered along with other data and ideas supportive of inclusion. The report therefore stimulates thinking and possibly debate about school climate and attitude in a variety of ways, whether role modeling, encouragement of friendships, and advocacy.

In contrast, the research undertaken at Peachland Primary and Elementary School was approached slightly differently, a team of three, whose credentials for writing about the school’s approach to inclusion were clearly referenced at the start of the study report, as was their research approach and goal:

The study was conducted by three teachers. One is a Primary teacher with 22 years’ experience, who has worked as a head teacher at Peachland Primary for eight years. The second is a district resource teacher, who has included Peachland in her assigned school for two years. Previous to this assignment she worked at the school as an integration facilitator and consulted on adapting computers for students with physical handicaps for four years. The third member of the team is a teacher-on-call (TOC) who has worked at both Peachland schools for four years. We also collaborated with Charlie Naylor, a researcher with the BCTF, for guidance on the research and bringing the research and written products into a cohesive whole.

Our collective aim was to discern what, in the minds of parents, students, teachers, administration, and district personnel, had contributed to making the inclusion program at Peachland schools such a great success. Questions we posed included: What policies and philosophies worked? Which ideas helped? What
materials and technologies were of benefit? What attitudes promoted inclusion? Which support systems were of the greatest benefit and why?

We hope that by reading this report you will gain some insight and practical ideas to help support and develop your own inclusionary program ( Partners for Inclusion, Peachland Primary and Elementary School, 1994, p. 2).

These data are from the products of the research - the Case Studies. They share information about the research team and the methods used. This reflects one way of moving the teacher inquiry into a more public space where others can access both methods and findings. The data I have used was publicly accessible, and the Case Studies were available to any interested reader. The very public nature of a final report meant that considerable effort was made to achieve clarity and utility in the publication. The utility of publication is in part because it encourages such clarity. But there is more than utility reflected in these studies. They also explore and document notions of ‘good’ teaching, which includes every student. With extensive focus on relationships, the studies stress education as a human rather than a technical enterprise. “Goodness’ therefore is about building relationships and community in schools which match the desired ends of community in the world beyond school - inclusive and respectful. This is a highly moral form of teaching, linking to Dewey (1922) and to Fenstermacher and Richardson (2005). Yet these explorations are not abstract. They articulate ways that relationships are built and developed both through individual agency, and through structures and processes which can support the building of relationships fostering inclusive approaches. All such structures are constructed, and they reflect forms of judgment by those whose agency constructed them. Permeating each Case Study is a belief in inclusion as a non-negotiable value in schools and society, a clear ‘end’ to work towards through inclusive teaching and both organizational and structural ‘means’. The goal is also focused on individual needs - how to maximize both learning and social development for students with and
without exceptionalities. Addressing this goal counters the bland approaches of ‘Standards’ and addresses what Kincheloe (2003) termed the ‘unique situations’ of individual learners.

The Case Studies, attractively printed and illustrated, still sell regularly, more than ten years after their publication, with one being used by a community college as a required text in their teacher assistant program. This collective effort from the union boosted the teachers’ inquiry approach because it produced and distributed a series of professional publications and supported the dissemination of information related to teacher inquiry and teacher practices throughout the province.

The project built skills and capacity for both the teachers involved, for myself, and for our union. I continued to learn about facilitating and collaborating in research through the experience of researching with others in a collaborative group. I also wonder if such learning and experiences become cumulative over time. Did I develop or refine approaches, develop skills during this project? I believe so, yet there was no consideration of this personal experience and learning until now.

There was one non-negotiable demand (publication) that I made that required compliance from participants which became established in projects such as this. This demand was made because we were financed by our union to conduct research, but we were expected to share that research with the union’s members who financed it. Thus the expectation of publication was non-negotiable, and was explicit from the start of the project.

The BCTF Teacher Research Assessment Project, 1997
This project provided BCTF funding to provide release time. Teachers were encouraged to reflect on and write about their assessment practices in an inquiry group. Information about the project was communicated to all BCTF members in the province, with an open invitation for any teacher to apply. Once applicants were selected, participants attended a one-day meeting with all expenses paid by the BCTF, including TOC costs. The structure of the meeting is shown below:

**Planning Day, November 21, 1995**

**AGENDA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>Introductions, welcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overview of Agenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.15</td>
<td>Overview of BCTF Teacher Research Project:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expectations, roles and outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions/discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.30</td>
<td>Video/discussion: What is teacher-research?</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>Coffee/tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.30</td>
<td>Assessment within the context of current educational change, mandated</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>reporting, new curriculum development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.45</td>
<td>Initial sharing of project ideas: poster session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme/concept - what are you researching?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Background - why is it important to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why do your research in the context of current education change?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prepare ideas for 5 minutes and present to group for five minutes.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group input/questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>Data collection/analysis/reporting: some options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>Applying the options to the individual projects:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- what data collection/analysis/reporting might your project include?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>On-going connections/interim reports/timelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>Plenary discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Close</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This Agenda reflects more than a schedule of events. It reflects a philosophy which invites teachers to consider concepts of teacher inquiry and the supports offered by the BCTF. But more importantly, it invites teachers to direct the focus of their inquiry and to use the BCTF as a resource. It does not direct them into any particular approach which
might match union policies. The agenda also invites discussion on teacher inquiry as a form of professional development with the question “What is teacher-research?” Similarly the Agenda identifies context as relevant, in this case centrally-mandated change. By posing a question about teacher research, participants were encouraged to reflect and share ideas among the group, thereby encouraging learning through the discourse, and shifting the individual into a more public space. By establishing the public space early, and with a focus on concepts (teacher research/context) rather than individual practice, the approach nudged participants into a safe ‘first base’ of going public – issues are more general, less personal. But as the discussion started, the community also started to develop, facilitating any future shift towards reflecting and opening up discussions of individual practice.

After this meeting, follow-up communication from me to the research group added to the discussion with some ideas for how the project might progress, based on participants’ views expressed at the meeting. Thus, one of my key roles involved summarizing and synthesizing the discussions in ways that could further the inquiry process:

Memo to: Teacher Research (Assessment) Group

From: Charlie Naylor

Date: December 19, 1995

I am enclosing the following information;
1. List of participants’ contact names and addresses, phone, fax and e-mail. Please check this list. Some of the e-mail addresses which you left were not complete, so I have added what I hope are the appropriate letters. This mostly applies to those of you with Community Learning Network addresses.

2. Notes from our meeting of November 21, providing an overview of the areas of interest that you shared.

Some additional thoughts on our meeting:
* Developing a sense of community and dialogue
Many teacher research projects have worked best when a sense of community and sharing is developed. While most of you are working individually I hope that we can share ideas and communicate regularly over the next few months. Some of you probably identified connections between your themes at our meeting and may engage in conversation around such themes.

* Why is the BCTF sponsoring teacher research in assessment?
Our view is that the BC education system has moved into an ‘implementation mode’ in which the Ministry of Education mandates and expects teacher compliance in implementation, with minimal input from teachers. Teacher research offers an opportunity to reflect and consider the effects of reporting mandates on student learning and on teachers’ assessment practices. Your efforts in reflecting on changing assessment practices may be a barometer of teacher thinking on this issue. Such reflective practice might be one way to influence policy development and will certainly be of interest in promoting teacher discussion of assessment practices and issues.

* How might you reflect?
How are changes affecting your students’ learning and your professional experience? Diaries and journals could be two ways of sharing experience. As were a number of others discussed at our initial meeting, reflections could be shared via e-mail so that a conversation develops over time. Remember to keep your practice front and centre in this project. Your reflections on your practice are at the heart of this project. We are not looking to show other teachers how to assess but to share with them how we assess, and how our practices are evolving. You may wish to examine your issues of concern during such evolution and how you deal with such issues. To some extent this may mean exposing some uncertainties and doubts. It’s your choice. The most important thing is not to assume that we are trying to describe exemplary practice. We are trying to describe real practice, with its successes, its questions and its problems.

* Expectations
Because the project is sponsored by the BCTF we want to share your reflections with other teachers. At the same time we have no wish to make the expectations onerous. You may wish to consider producing one report towards the end of the project or a shorter series of pieces to share with other teachers. Some of you may be interested in considering contributing to a ‘Teacher’ article within the next few months. As we progress I will be sharing some teacher research reports with you for your consideration. With this memo I am sending an article by Jennifer Smith: “Setting the Cat among the pigeons: A Not So Sentimental Journey to the Heart of Teaching’. I think it’s a wonderful and creative paper combining poetry and prose, reflecting on self and students, initially through a diary format and then through reflections on the diary. If you have examples of your own or other writing you wish to share, please do so.

* Enjoy the project!
I hope this turns out to be an interesting and positive experience for everybody involved. I'm looking forward to chatting and sharing ideas with you over the next few months. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to assist you.

Have a great holiday. Talk to you in January.

The above communication is an additional way to encourage reflection, by building on and sharing the ideas generated in discussion. It also ensures that teacher autonomy is respected, with choices made by the teachers involved. Expectations, while minimal, are explicit, especially the expectation of reporting. As with other communications, it ends with encouragement and aims to create a sense that the inquiry process and approach can be successful. This communication closely resembles a communication to participants in the Partners for Inclusion Case Study, but is less explicit in terms of methods. The similarity occurs in terms of synthesizing information, identifying the need for reporting, one literature link to generate thinking about alternative ways of reflection, and some level of encouragement to participants. In terms of supporting teachers' learning, the document reflects a respect for teacher autonomy by giving total control of the focus and reflection to participants. Teacher autonomy is central to notions of teacher learning through professional development articulated by Burbank and Kauchuk (2003), with their view that "autonomy, choice and active participation are critical to effective professional development". While articulating one view of context, such a view is offered as a basis for discussion, not as a union view which participants need to accept. By articulating context in a meeting, consideration of context is encouraged but the choice of whether context would be considered was left to the teachers involved.

The introduction to this project in the published collection of reports includes the following statements:
In sponsoring this teacher research project, the BCTF Research Division wanted to consider teachers’ current assessment practices in the context of government-mandated changes in reporting. The results of this inquiry are intended to promote professional conversation about assessment and reporting. The BCTF supports teacher research because many teachers prefer to initiate inquiry as autonomous professionals rather than merely reacting to or implementing the initiatives and mandates of government. By supporting inquiry we hope to promote and to shape the debate on assessment and to improve teachers’ influence on future policy (BCTF Research: The Teacher Research Project (Assessment), January, 1997, p. 1).

In retrospect, the first statement reflected an intention that was realized, albeit for a limited time. There was no teacher influence on policy, and any expectation of realizing such influence now appears naïve and fanciful.

I distributed information about this project through the BCTF’s print and on-line communication systems, inviting expressions of interest and applications from BCTF members. The BCTF also provided five days’ release time for the seven teachers selected, who worked in elementary, junior secondary and secondary schools in urban and rural settings.

The political context was that the constructivist and collaborative philosophy of the ‘Year 2000’ program had been terminated by the NDP government, accelerating a trend towards increased government mandates, and the elimination of government support for teacher inquiry and research. Thus there was, perhaps as always within a union environment, a political context, with the BCTF’s support for teacher inquiry an attempt to counter centralized mandates and implementation approaches. The inquiry process we initiated allowed each teacher complete freedom to reflect on and articulate their views and practices of assessment. There was no prescribed or preferred form of assessment. The only requirement was that each person must write a report, thereby continuing the
focus on product and public sharing of inquiry reports which had started with the earlier case Study project. During the process of writing, each participant was offered feedback and editing support, which I provided. Each teacher researcher had final control over the report he or she had authored. The seven reports were published in hard copy by the BCTF, and several seminars to share the work with teachers were held in various locations.

The project involved a level of collaboration between myself and the individual researchers, but collaboration among the group was minimal. I recognized this in a memorandum to participants dated March 19, 1995:

I will be away from Vancouver between March 28 and April 15, and wanted to catch up with you all before leaving. I have been aware in the last few months that the dialogue and communication has been quite limited on this project. I apologise if you have been left to work without any significant level of support from me up to this point. I would like to make sure that you are all adequately supported in the writing phase of your projects, and am ready to visit you, or to communicate in whatever ways suit you, after April 15, if this would prove useful.

This problem was also recognized by the group in a reflection after the project, and was reported in the 1997 Introduction:

One finding in terms of process resulting from this project is that effective collaboration is crucial. Levels of collaboration during this project were not effective and several participants identified isolation as a problem and a weakness of the project.

Anticipated discourse through electronic communication did not occur – in retrospect the form of collaboration should have been decided by the group, but it was effectively imposed by myself because of cost limits – we could not afford to transport the group to Vancouver for regular meetings (BCTF Research: The Teacher Research Project (Assessment), January, 1997, p. 3).

There were also delays in my reaching people. Facilitation of teacher inquiry was one of several areas of my work, and not always easy to fit into busy schedules and other
responsibilities, as evidenced in the following e-mail – again a composite of several messages intended to convey the spirit and content of communication rather than divulge one message sent to an individual.

Dear *********

I’m really sorry to have been so long in getting back to you - this year has been incredibly hectic. I love what I have read of your report so far. I think it really wonderfully combines reflection and context, including the context of students’ work. Towards the end of the document there are some sections which may still be in progress. Any change with those areas? Would it be possible to get together some time after June 10 after school for an hour or so to have a chat re this work? I have some space on June 11 if that would be possible and could come to you. Other than that it would have to be some time on the week of June 17. Let’s work out a time that suits you.

Thanks again for sharing this work to date. I think it will be a great contribution to understanding more about assessment. I want to have the material ready for us to work on here to publish over the summer. Could you give our departmental assistant ********** a call next week to arrange a time, as I will be away from the office all week?

Thanks a lot,

Charlie

(E-mail from records of the project).

These data indicate some level of willingness to identify weaknesses or mistakes in our approach to teacher inquiry, both during internal discussions/communications, and in our publication. Such mistakes are part of learning an approach - something to acknowledge and to reflect on, rather than to ignore. By articulating our errors we may avoid making them again. By including them in publication we encourage others to learn from our mistakes, but also to understand that errors are part of research, and part of learning.
The process of reflection and writing was valued by the participants, and led to a publication that is teacher-authored. While the reports vary in style and quality, several are still powerful and useful documents. They model ways of sharing and presenting teacher research to a wider audience, hence increasing the public nature of the inquiry, and allow current teacher researchers to consider approaches to reporting their inquiry. One participant’s report documented what she believed to be ways that her value had accrued to her learning through the inquiry process in a section of her report where she reflects on the inquiry approach:

Have I answered the two questions with which I opened this paper? Do I know how children come to understand and use mathematical ideas? Am I now able to find out what each child in my classes understands about the mathematical ideas I teach? Of course, the answer has to be that I am not able to give a categorical ‘yes’ to either question. Until science is able to chart the physiological and psychological nature of learning, as a classroom teacher it would be foolish and presumptuous of me to state that I have all the answers to the question “how do children learn?” But what I do have now is a much more effective repertoire of strategies for accessing my students’ knowledge, as well as strategies that seem to me to be helping my students acquire a more solid understanding of the important mathematical concepts and skills that will probably be needed in order to use mathematics-confidently in their real lives outside of school. I know that I will continue to search to access and extend student understanding and skills in ways that honour them as individual people. I know that I will continue to look for the answers to my questions in my classroom as I work with each new class of students (May, 1996, p. 23).

How can this be read without accepting the teacher’s claim that value has accrued both to her as a teacher, and to the students in her charge? While it cannot be shown in detail here, the above quote concludes a report in which the teacher-researcher describes her use developing children’s drawing to build mathematical skills. As her students drew images from her instructions (“The school bus holds 40 people when it is full. Draw the bus and show all 40 people.”), she was able to identify students’ comprehension or difficulties in using mathematics to complete the drawing. But in addition to examining the pictures, she also interviewed her Grade 4 students, transcribing the discussions, and considering
both what students said and reflecting on the implications for her own practice. The intensity of her focus, her range of data collection, and exploration of new Math curriculum as context, all demonstrate a teacher using inquiry to maximize her skills and capacity as a teacher while also maximizing her students' learning. In terms of teachers using inquiry to improve teaching and learning, it does not get much better than that.

This project included a professional development day held at Royal Roads University in Victoria. At this day, the teacher researchers presented their work and took part in discussions on Assessment. The day was planned with the Professional Development Chairs of several Vancouver Island teacher associations of the BCTF after they had reacted positively to a letter I sent to them on October 5, 1996:

During the 1995/96 school year eight elementary and secondary teachers joined a BCTF teacher research project which focused on the issue of assessment. In light of changing mandates in reporting, and with the introduction of Integrated Resource Packages, BCTF Research was interested in encouraging teachers' reflection on assessment practices. The eight teachers each received five days release time to conduct their inquiry, and each was required to write a report to share with other teachers. I am enclosing a copy of my introduction to the report of the project. The full set of the collected teachers' reports will soon be available from BCTF Research.

A primary aim of the project is to use the research as one way of encouraging professional discourse on the issue of assessment. To further this end I am proposing jointly planning a workshop or seminar on assessment in conjunction with yourself as the PD Chair of the local teacher association and with a district staff person who has an interest in professional development.

The seminar might focus on themes such as methods (portfolios), subjects (elementary math assessment), issues (letter grades) or communication (with parents or students). Roundtable sharing sessions might offer a chance for informal sharing, and the teacher research reports would provide some background materials for participants. Other teacher-researchers might be invited to share their reports at the seminar. I believe the sessions should be pragmatic, offering some ideas for teachers to use in their assessment of students.

I am also in the process of initiating discussion with SFU, UBC and UVic with the idea of initiating a similar assessment seminar on each campus during this academic year, to include interested faculty associates, teachers-in-training,
teachers and faculty. Such seminars would be planned with staff from the universities but you would be welcome to participate in the on-campus seminars.

Please contact me if you are interested in this idea. Perhaps an informal meeting might give us a chance to develop this further.

This professional development day to consider and discuss teacher inquiry was attended by about fifty teachers. Most of the research group attended and presented their findings, before roundtable discussion were held. Teachers who had expressed an interest in one or more of the teacher research reports were sent copies of the reports prior to the day, so that they could read them prior to the presentations. The day represented one new form of 'going public' and reporting with presentations of union-led research, involving peers in collegial discourse about both approach and findings. It also introduced one way of local teacher association PD Chairs becoming more involved in the dissemination of teacher inquiry through their involvement with this professional development activity. In this activity, PD Chairs were central to the planning of the day, rather than being in roles of booking rooms and arranging food. The potential for expanding the role of the PD Chair towards being involved in conceptual rather than organizational issues in teacher locals is one issue discussed later in this research.

Participants were also invited to present to staff at the BCTF, and to reflect on the project, as shown in the following e-mail sent to participants:

The project is nearing completion, with most of the reports now submitted to me. They make wonderful reading and I would like to thank you very much for the work that you have put into this project.

I also want to invite you to a 'research sharing day' at the BCTF on Friday October 4. Release time will be provided for those who can attend, and travel expenses will be paid by the BCTF. The purposes of the day are:

1. To share the findings of your research with the group and with a number of BCTF staff.
2. To consider the draft of the introduction to the report, which is enclosed. Please consider input prior to the meeting and e-mail any suggestions if possible prior to the day.
3. To discuss a strategy for using your work as a basis for initiating professional seminars in conjunction with teacher locals, district staff and with the three main BC universities.
4. To evaluate the project and to provide advice for future teacher research projects (Retrieved from project files).

Both these professional development days moved the teacher inquiry into more public spaces. It created a more public space within the union, inviting other BCTF staff to consider the research, while also going beyond the union to involve teachers from several school districts and university faculty in discussions about the work conducted. It built connections between the concept of teacher inquiry and the structures and supports offered by local teacher associations PD Chairs, attempting to move them beyond the role of organizers to that of participants in discussing teacher inquiry as an approach to professional development.

Politically, I was very naive in articulating this approach as a potentially effective counter to government mandates. While it was intended as a counter, it was totally ineffective, essentially being ignored by the government of the day, as have most inquiry projects I have been involved with since that date. Does that mean I would not initiate such a project again? Not necessarily, but likely with less assumption that systems will change because of one teacher inquiry project. I now think much more of John Elliott’s view on teacher research in the context of government mandates. John Elliott (2005), reflecting on Action Research in the UK, argued that teachers have and will continue to struggle against controls that reduce autonomy, and limit reflection and peer discourse:

The space for the exercise of such (teacher) agency will not come simply as a gift from government. It will be wrought out of a political struggle, by teachers and others within society, to create the material conditions for a free, open and
democratically constructed practical discourse to emerge as a context for professional action (p. 363).

Are this and other BCTF teacher inquiry projects a part of such a struggle, with the union offering support for teacher inquiry which potentially contribute to the kind of discourse articulated by Elliott? This question will be addressed later in the research.

The Fraser-Cascade teacher research project, 1999

In 1998, I co-facilitated a two-day teacher research training session under the BCTF’s ‘Program for Quality Teaching’ program in Hope. The two days introduced a group of teachers in the Fraser-Cascade school district to the idea of and possible approaches to teacher research. At the conclusion of the two days, the group discussed the training and considered the future, saying to us, their training facilitators, “OK, we’ve done the training, now let’s do some teacher research, and you folks can come back and facilitate us.” We had clearly done too good a job on selling the facilitation idea! After some discussion, and the provision of release time by the school district, we committed to facilitating the group, agreeing to meet them six times, once a month for three hours, during the coming school year.

Because this project was not planned as a BCTF project, there are fewer documents which reflect on-going thinking and discussion about the project. Indeed, the above paragraph describes the ad-hoc nature of its evolution. In spite of this somewhat casual approach, the experience of this project was reflective of the union's growing capacity to respond to inquiry requests rather than initiating them. Documentation includes the final research reports produced by the eight teachers involved.
Most of the eight participants had an individual focus and issue on which they were reflecting, including using drawing to encouraging writing, working with parents to support children’s reading, and mathematical problem-solving. The Introduction to the study outlined the topics and discussed the teacher research approach:

Topics addressed by the Hope teacher researchers consisted of: mathematical problem-solving; combining art and story-telling to improve literacy; writing strategies for students who work slowly; Grade 1 reading programs for the hardest-to-teach students; helping parents support their children’s reading; successful aspects of teachers’ sharing classrooms. While the topics are varied, two commonalties permeate the themes. First, titles reflect the pragmatic and student-focused nature of the research. Each issue is an everyday issue, not an esoteric phenomenon. The second commonalty is that each issue intrigues and puzzles the inquirer - while each teacher believes the approach being investigated has considerable utility, it’s not quite right yet. ‘How can we better communicate with parents?’ ‘How should I modify this reading program?’ ‘Why do students have difficulty with problem-solving?’ Such questions reflect an intention to strive for improvement in practice, and through systematic inquiry, to provide the best education for students.

It is this motivation towards professional improvement that makes teacher research such a powerful and positive tool for those who engage in it. With this group, the relevant and recognizable nature of each researcher’s issue also stimulated discussion and peer critiquing of works-in-progress. In effect, each member of the group became a ‘critical friend’ of the kind described in much of the Action Research literature: one who listens carefully and extends the researcher’s thinking by posing challenging questions while playing a significant part in maintaining a supportive, sociable yet professional framework (BCTF Teacher Inquiry, Fraser-Cascade Teacher Research, 1999).

During the meetings, we found a very high level of interest from all members of the group in each area of focus. Each issue resonated with and interested each person, even if each research focus was different. This led to many wonderful and stimulating conversations – as reflected in this comment by one of the group:

Whether we worked alone or in pairs, the group was a supportive place that encouraged us. Discussions with the group enabled each of us to explore our research questions in more depth than would have been possible working alone (Retrieved from participant evaluation form).

Similarly, another participant explained why she had wanted to participate in the project:
I chose to take part in a teacher research project because I wanted to take a closer look at questions that I had previously been studying. The teacher research project gave me a new reason to explore this area and an opportunity to bounce off ideas with colleagues in my district. More importantly, I could try out some of the strategies I had used in my past research in my current classroom and try to figure out what works for my students. Furthermore, as teachers, I think we find ourselves cut off from other adults in our field (especially in a small rural school ... the opportunity to discuss ideas and concerns with similarly-minded teachers can be both stimulating and a relief (Retrieved from participant evaluation form).

Most of the research group reflected on the utility of the reflective process in their evaluation form:

- I find I can reflect upon my teaching more coherently when I have done some investigation about it
- Working with other teachers in the field is a really good way to exchange ideas
- Working with a teacher group is a good vehicle for exploring what other educators are currently thinking about and for sharing contemporary educational concerns.
- The teachers who were in the group have some great ideas - it was wonderful to be able to learn something new.
- I am grateful to the BCTF for encouraging this ongoing “action” research. (Retrieved from participant evaluation form)

The clear differences between this and the 1997 Assessment project were in terms of the discourse within the group, and structures and supports which facilitated such discourse. The monthly meeting provided time and the chance to focus for both participants and facilitators. It was this discourse that most engaged teachers, in part because it stimulated them in thinking about their professional practice and because it was very clearly linked in their minds to improving student learning, even though they appeared tentative about claiming benefits for students through teacher inquiry:

I enjoyed the camaraderie of the group - listening and bickering about similar concerns and questions. I believe the discussions and questions drove the learning process forward, giving us new insights to take to the classroom. The process alone seemed to be valuable to our teaching practice. The natural product of the research process should be improved teaching and learning for our students ...hopefully (BCTF Teacher Inquiry, Fraser-Cascade Teacher Research, 1999, p. vii).
The group's meetings were primarily conversations, structured and facilitated but allowing content to be decided by the teacher researchers. They allowed for debate, sharing, and problem-posing. They exemplified professional exploration and collegial discourse. Over time I have realized how crucial these notions actually are. Teacher inquiry is about exploration, about wondering, about dialogue, but in my experience it always comes back to a focus on students' learning. The means of inquiry are used for the goal of better meeting the needs of students. This connection was explicitly made by teachers in their reports:

For this research I focused on four students, and wrote personal profiles on them to identify personal traits... Samples of each stage of their writing were collected and a journal was kept with reflections of each stage of the writing, on the process, achievements and behaviours of the four identified students. Three writing strategies were implemented for the study.... The strategies are described in full with a corresponding analysis (Bailey, 1999, p. 2).

Another teacher-researcher stated:

Equipped with current research on literacy and borrowing from Language Experience methods (scribing children's stories in Kindergarten and pre-school), I was determined to find ways to use drawing, storytelling and writing in a Writer's Workshop context. How could valuing and encouraging visual stories in the classroom help the reluctant readers and writers become literate?... I wanted to explore the importance of drawing further. The opportunity for action research facilitated by the BCTF's 'Program for Quality Teaching' was the impetus for another look (Fushtey, 1999, p. 42).

Following this posing of a research question, the teacher reviewed information collected for her master's thesis, wrote student profiles, outlined a 'drawing and storytelling in the writing process' approach she would follow, encouraged her students to draw then draft (or have transcribed) the stories.

This extract indicates both a desire to meet students' needs and to build the teacher's own learning through inquiry. The report tells half the story - the other half mirrored both
aspects of teacher learning and students’ needs and occurred during the group discussions. Sadly, little of these data are still available. However, the author’s description of her research indicates both her need and desire to learn more, and in so doing, to better support the learning of her students. These themes of teacher and student learning permeate all the Fraser-Cascade reports.

Communication with the teacher researchers included editing drafts, and soliciting reflections on the experience of teacher research for publication. The following e-mail that I sent to the research group reflected the relief because the reports had been finalized and were being prepared for printing:

Hi, folks,

The papers you wrote are all in Graphics being formatted. They will be ready by Christmas, and should make excellent stocking-stuffers. We will have them as a package but will also be accessible as individual reports, possibly on our web site as well as in hard copy. Sorry they are so late but as you may know all has not been smooth sailing in the BCTF tug during the last 6 months.

I am writing an introduction to the papers and would appreciate a few comments from you in terms of why you chose to do teacher research and what you gained from it. I am particularly interested in any thoughts about how you would compare this experience with other professional development experiences, and how useful having the group of peers available with regular meetings was for you.

Thanks and look forward to seeing you in the New Year.

Charlie
(Email retrieved from project files).

All of the eight teachers in the inquiry group completed a report. Titles included: Writing strategies for children who write slowly; Turning caterpillars into butterflies; Drawing to write; Mathematical problem-solving. It would be hard to imagine any teacher research groups and reports more focused on the immediate needs of students than these. They focus exclusively on students and on learning and teaching, all of them efforts to use
teacher inquiry to build better educational experiences and outcomes for a wide range of students. By producing published reports, these teachers move into more public space, inviting readers to share their ideas and thinking, opening the work to scrutiny and potential challenge.

Every conversation focused the minds of the whole group on any one issue or approach, so that meetings became a time for each person to explain their inquiry journey to date, to share successes and doubts, to ask for ideas and for help in addressing their issue of concern. The discussion built better understanding and built the community of inquiry which was valued by those who created it:

I felt that I grew professionally from being involved with the group, as well as from the research I did. It started me on a road of inquiry I am still pursuing. I enjoyed working with a group of teachers; the talk; the feedback, the diversity of points of view on the same topic, on different topics, the feeling of community from working together with a group. I would participate in another group, however this time I think it would be more beneficial if everyone worked on the same topic, but explored a different question, such as math or language arts, or diversity, or whatever (Teacher Inquiry, Fraser-Cascade Teacher Research, 1999, p. viii-ix).

Another difference with this project involves the changing nature of BCTF support. Co-facilitation, very successful with this group, appears to be an under-explored area of the literature. It allowed for rich discussions on the two-hour drive to and from the teacher researchers’ school district. It also allowed for different skills and knowledge to come into play during the monthly discussions. Each facilitator found more time to observe during the meetings, while the other took a more active facilitative role. This approach has been expanded in more recent BCTF inquiry projects, and the concept of co-facilitation might offer a contribution to the development of future inquiry approaches.
In terms of editing and publication, there was an increased use of other internal BCTF support: the Research Division used the talents of an excellent proof-reader; the Graphics department skillfully supported the project with layout and design of the publication; the Production department found and contracted a publisher, with the costs paid from the PD and Research Divisions of the BCTF. Copies were distributed to every local teacher association in BC, and the 107-page publication was made available at cost through the BCTF Lesson Aids department. What this support reflects is the capacity and potential of the BCTF to support teacher inquiry, and subsequent publication and dissemination. It also demonstrated that teacher research can be enjoyable and manageable for both participants and facilitators, as reflected in the comments by the co-facilitators', Charlie Naylor and Mohammed Shamsher, at the end of their introduction to the BCTF final report:

We are very grateful that this group of teachers in Fraser-Cascade invited us to join their journey of inquiry. We enjoyed working with them and learning about their professional interests and aspirations. It gave us an opportunity to learn how teacher research can be successful in promoting professional growth for teachers and better learning for student (BCTF, 1999, p. X).

The Nanaimo/Coquitlam study, 2002

This study was undertaken at a time of considerable change in BC schools, with considerable impact on Special Education, Learning Assistance, and ESL. $230m was removed by government from targeted Special Education funding. Legislation removed all contract language affecting Special Education, Learning Assistance and ESL services, thus allowing any form of class composition, and removing ratios of specialist teachers linked to enrolments. The BCTF study was not a classic teacher research project but a collaborative research project which involved approximately twenty teachers from School District #43, Coquitlam, and School District #68, Nanaimo. All the teachers
applied to be part of the project and worked with me to design and undertake research which considered and documented the effects of such changes.

All teachers employed in the two districts were offered the opportunity to apply for roles as teacher-researchers with this project through a letter distributed to all teachers by the local teacher associations. Once the initial letter was posted to all teachers, another communication was mailed to those who expressed an interest in applying to be involved in the project. One such letter (Oct 2, 2002) – to teachers in School District # 68, Nanaimo - is shown below:

Thank you for your application to join the BCTF Research project on Special Education and ESL in Nanaimo. I would like to invite you to join a planning meeting for this project on Tuesday, October 29, at the Nanaimo District Teachers Association office, 12.00-3.30 p.m. Release time will be arranged once you confirm your attendance and lunch will be provided. To confirm that you will attend, please contact me as soon as possible in any of the following ways: Telephone 1-800-663-9163, ext. 2254, or direct line: 604-871-2254. Fax: 604-871-2294. E-mail: cnaylor@bctf.ca

The purpose of the meeting is to involve all applicants in preliminary planning of the projects, and to clarify levels of participation. Some applicants may prefer to be involved for the full five days of release time, while others may prefer to participate in Focus Groups. However, we hope to use your expertise to help initial planning of the projects at this meeting.

The two projects are:
1. Monitoring the effects of changes in Special Education and ESL in the district
2. Examining the role of the specialist support teacher (e.g. ESL, Special Education, Learning Assistance)

For planning purposes, the following areas will help focus our thinking, but please bring other ideas with you to the meeting:

Funding levels and allocations
Changes in the models of delivery
Class size/composition
Teacher/staffing data
Impacts on students, families and teachers
The changing nature of specialist support teachers’ work
Some data collection methods may include:

Accessing Ministry, school district and BCTF data on funding, class size, teacher numbers/specialist positions etc.
Focus Groups with classroom and specialist support teachers, teacher assistants, parents of students with special needs.
Teacher diaries, or ‘day-in-the life’ stories, interviews.

I will provide a review of some of these approaches and possibilities at the start of the meeting. Please be aware that no research expertise is required, but some writing will be required for those teachers involved for the five days. Thank you for expressing an interest in the BCTF Research projects in your district. I hope you are able to attend the meeting on October 29, and I look forward to hearing your views on planning the research projects.

(Retrieved from project files).

The letter outlined the project, levels of participation/support, and explicit statements about expectations, notably that of writing/reporting. But it also made clear that the research would be guided by teacher participants in the research, so that the project became a collaborative effort, with directions and approaches to be decided collectively.

This research includes an examination of educational contexts, in which the work of teachers is situated. Fenstermacher and Richardson’s (2005) four conditions that they considered necessary for student engagement and success included ‘opportunities to teach and learn’. Opportunities to teach and learn are in part dependent on how well an education system is supported, whether it has enough funds to pay for adequate services and materials. As Cuban (2003) argued, all children can learn if legislatures provide schools with adequate funds. Good schools depend on such funding as much as they do on good teaching, and this study explored teachers’ work when funding previously directed at Inclusion was spread over other educational services, and when staffing to support Inclusion was reduced. ‘Opportunities to learn’ were explored in this project as
the research considered the ramifications of a series of BC government funding, legislative and contractual changes for student learning, and teachers' capacity to teach.

As part of the design process I met several times with the teacher-researchers to discuss data collection. After these meetings I would draft the agreed approach and send such a draft back to those involved. The following document summarizes the approach decided on by the groups. To get to this stage, meetings would have been held with the research teams. Ideas for data collection would be discussed and decided upon, after which my role was to document what had been decided collectively by the group. This is one document sent back to the groups, so that they would know what had been decided, and what roles would be taken. The record also served as a chance for the researchers to check the accuracy of my reporting and to add to it or make changes if I had misunderstood or misstated a direction:

December 5, 2002

Special Education/ESL research project in Nanaimo and Coquitlam

I have now completed preliminary meetings with teachers in both Nanaimo and Coquitlam, and have a clearer idea regarding details of the data collection focus and approach. If possible, I hope to have broadly parallel areas of data collection so that we may consider some comparisons between the districts.

In each district there will be a combination of data collected from or about the district, and other data which will be collected in a few school sites. District-wide data includes areas such as profiles, the evolution of Special Education and ESL in the district, Focus Groups and 1701 data. School sites for data collection will be selected so that the sites generally reflect the geographic, socio-economic and cultural mix of the district. Data collected in sites will include the Case Studies, 'Day in the Life of the Specialist Teacher', surveys of teachers.

Timelines and roles

I suggest that the bulk of the data be collected in January and February. I hope to go over and stay in Nanaimo for one week in January and for one week in February to work with the team there, who will take some of their release time during those weeks.
Coquitlam’s data would be collected in a similar way, with the weeks staggered so that I would be available to the research team during the weeks of data collection. I would aim to complete all data collection by Spring Break.

I will provide whatever data can be found from central district or provincial sources, assist wherever possible in the actual data collection, and offer any training and support that research team members identify.

My suggestion would be that there be one training/information session for all researchers on:

- Data collection techniques - observation, structured interviews, using key informants, document retrieval, ethics and etiquette etc.
- Analysis and reporting, likely developing a common format.

I would anticipate that most of the data collected in the Case Studies, ‘day in the life’ of Specialist Teachers and Evolution of Special Ed and ESL would be collected by the teacher researchers, with the Focus Group, 1701, District Profiles and survey report being my responsibility, but with input from the group prior to publication. I would also aim to collect school-specific data such as enrolments and numbers of students with special needs/ESL students, which can be accessed from central sources, so that team members have less data to collect in the school. In terms of roles, these areas are all negotiable. The important thing is that we complete the year’s project with some useful data and reports without killing ourselves in the process. Let me know where your strengths and preferences are, and when you need help.

Finally, thank you very much for all your time, ideas and input. This project would not work without you and your contribution is greatly appreciated.

(Document retrieved from project files).

We asked many teachers to reflect on the changes that were occurring and to share their stories and perspectives. A total of 45 reports were published, including a number of teacher-written Case Studies (Allen, 2003) of schools or of individual teachers.

In each of the two districts a group of about ten teachers met with me to decide on data collection and to discuss case writing. No editorial restrictions were placed on the teachers’ reports, though all were offered editing and proof-reading support, with final control over publication in the teachers’ control. There were several drafts of reports. A
teacher would draft a section, then e-mail it to me. I would return the draft with edits suggested, or questions posed. Examples are shown below, with the teacher-researcher’s text in small case, and my comments in bold and italicized:

The well established Behaviour Support Room continues in place. This is a four day per week program supporting the learning needs of students with moderate to severe behavioural concerns. Students work in the regular classrooms but are supported by drop-in support staff to deal with behaviour or to offer learning intervention. *(has amount of time changed between this year and last?)*

Classroom and specialist support teachers worry about the ethical and professional ramifications of such practice. *(explain this - what are they worried about?)*

The district support structure has changed dramatically since June 2 *(how?)* As part of this restructuring the itinerant model of special services delivery, IST, *(what’s this? spell it out!)* ESL and ESD has been dramatically reduced and the direction for special support has become the mandate of the school-based manager. *(who is this – not name but what job?)*

The research attempted to describe what was occurring in schools as a result of the imposed changes in funding, legislation and contract. Perhaps the most political of all the union’s collaborative research projects, this project challenged the government view that changes did not negatively affect services, as it documented reduced services, reduced specialist support for students with special needs, crushing teacher workloads and significant differences in services linked to schools’ socio-economic status. Some data gathering was difficult and emotional, with teachers close to tears as they described their efforts to meet all needs with less time, and with fewer colleagues after over 2,000 teachers were laid off across the province.

One teacher discussed how the changes had made it very difficult to do the job. While the issue was clearly one of resources and not individual competence, the teacher also said it was hard to escape a sense of guilt or personal inadequacy in terms of meeting the needs of students. He said:
I have not felt this inadequate in my job in over twenty years, when the system I was working in was in some upheaval due to realignment of schools. It’s an unnerving experience to feel so inadequate, and it’s a challenge to keep it ‘outside,’ rather than taking it in and internalizing it as my problem (Focus Group report).

Another section outlined a pervasive strain felt by specialist teachers:

The caseload is very heavy, and staffs feel they are “chronically behind.” When staff become ill, they feel even more pressure, and further behind. There is more sickness among staff; people are feeling more pressure, but still trying to make time. Staffs are very busy, working extra hours, tired, and becoming ill (Focus Group report).

Another teacher called her report “We’re dancing as fast as we can,” and wrote:

The quote which started this report poignantly reflects the current state of anxiety common in the teachers who met to share their views. It may also be reflective of many other teachers in the district. This group of teachers is tough and highly experienced. They are used to working in a challenging and difficult environment. Over many years they have thrived on the challenges before them, but tackled them with confidence and courage. They believed that they were moving in directions which built better programs and services for the students in their care. This feeling has gone, and they look forward to retiring from a system which they feel has betrayed them, and the students of this secondary school.

This past year she has considered moving back into the classroom as a change, but would it really give her more time to do the job to the quality she likes to do it? The Student Services job is so overwhelming, if you do it right, and she will not let herself do anything less. She has also considered moving to a new job and/or a new school, but is worried about the needy group of Grade 7s moving through the school right now and the relationships she has already started to build to support their upcoming Grade 8 year (Allen, 2003).

This teacher-research was the first source in British Columbia to identify a potential exodus out of the specialist teacher role in Learning Assistance, Special Education and ESL, an exodus which has since become a pervasive reality with massive numbers of experienced support teachers opting for classroom assignments, and new and inexperienced teachers taking ‘specialist’ positions which have now become entry-level jobs in the province of BC. Teacher research is rarely in the position of identifying trends.
of this kind, but in this case, a focus on the role of specialist teachers by other teachers collecting data through interviews was enough to identify an issue that has since become a major problem in this province.

Another issue identified by teacher researchers concerned the pressures on secondary schools for achievement measured in tests, and whether students with special needs reduced the schools' capacities to meet expectations when exam results were reported and schools compared:

It was particularly disheartening to hear at the staff meeting the other day that some teachers had no patience for "these kids" because they are affecting the school's test and exam results that are published. This group of specialist support teachers felt that accountability issues were beginning to dominate the agenda at the expense of student interests and needs. Instead of working towards being more inclusive, staff were concerned about the quality of the results being published (Focus Group report).

I would argue that this project reflects a form of collaborative teacher inquiry, albeit using more standard research methods. In conducting this research we combined the capacity of a professional researcher (myself) with the practical knowledge and skills of teachers in schools. The methods and approaches were published on the BCTF web site, as were all reports, and when one of the school districts replicated the focus of our inquiry, they produced identical results. Such replication validated our approach and results. The teachers collected and analyzed data, or participated in Focus Groups and surveys. They interviewed and shadowed colleagues in their daily routines, returning to discuss their findings, and to consider how to produce their reports.

The reports that were published on the BCTF web site collectively portray a system in turmoil, with the most disadvantaged students - those with special needs - bearing the brunt of reduced services. By researching teachers' lives in schools, the project linked
observations and interviews with other data that showed serious problems caused by
government changes. Simply put, the inclusionary model was being put under such
intense strain with the result that a range of services were not being provided and teachers
were opting for less stressful positions. This new understanding, while pessimistic, was
derived from data and evidence, and supports teachers' learning if one assumes that such
learning includes an understanding of 'opportunities to teach and learn', or what
constrains them. The inquiry approach also matches what Hyland and Noffke (2005)
described in terms of 'deconstructing experiences through discussions and critical
reflection' (p. 378) by providing data which could form part of such critical reflection -
both in terms of practice and context.

As the research progressed we also reported its progress to the BCTF Executive. The
Document below is extracted from one such report to the BCTF Executive in April 2003:

**The BCTF Research Project in Special Education, Learning Assistance, and ESL - a Report to the BCTF Executive**

This is one of the most extensive data collection efforts undertaken by BCTF
Research. 17 teachers from Coquitlam and Nanaimo have worked with BCTF
Research staff to collect and report a wide range of data to help us understand
what is happening with Inclusion and ESL in two districts' schools over time and
during this school year. They have shown great determination and considerable
research skills to help collect these data. Without their knowledge and skills, this
project would not have been possible.

The Coquitlam and Nanaimo Teacher Associations have provided meeting space,
organized recruitment of teacher researchers, and been incredibly supportive and
positive about the project.

Dozens of teachers have attended Focus Groups in both districts, providing a
wealth of information and showing both their passion for teaching and their
distress at what they see in their schools this year, as cuts to staffing and programs
negatively impact students and increase teacher workload and stress. Over three
hundred teachers have completed surveys which are being processed and
analyzed.
Parents of students with special needs have told their stories of struggle over the years to get the best learning experiences for their children. Many of these stories were challenging, but need to be heard.

The research project is therefore a collective and a collaborative effort, and it is a work in progress. Some reports are complete, and we hope to have most of the rest completed in the next two months.

(Document retrieved from project files).

The above document served to inform the BCTF Executive of the project, and to inform them of teachers; roles as researchers in union research. There were two reasons for reporting the research projects’ progress to the BCTF Executive. First, it raised the profile of the research activity within the organization, informing the elected Executive of the Research Division’s work and the involvement of their members in research. The second reason was that it linked research to advocacy and action intended to improve inclusive education for students in BC schools. Motions were prepared for the BCTF Executive, which affirmed its commitment to Inclusion with the passing of the following motions:

**Motions**

1. That the BCTF affirms the human rights of all students in an inclusionary\(^7\) public education system which prepares students for full citizenship in a democratic society.

2. That the BCTF believes that the human rights of many BC students are being infringed because services to many students with special learning needs, and to ESL students are being eroded, and cannot be sustained with current levels of support.

\(^7\)“Inclusion is the value system which holds that all students are entitled to equitable access to learning, achievement and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their education. The practice of inclusion transcends the idea of physical location, and incorporates basic values that promote participation, friendship and interaction” (BC Ministry of Education Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines for Special Education Services, 1995).
3. That the province’s implementation of the current policy of inclusion is in crisis. The BCTF Executive endorses a dual approach by the BCTF intended to address this crisis:

   i. Advocacy for increased and improved systemic support for inclusion
   ii. The development and dissemination of practical supports and strategies that assist teachers, and the parents of students with special needs, to extend good inclusionary practices in BC’s public schools.

4. That a communication strategy be developed by staff in the Campaigns/Communications Division to support the directions approved above.

(Document retrieved from BCTF records).

This motion originated because of the research evidence supporting a case that inclusionary services were strained and inadequate to meet students’ needs. That evidence was provided by teams of teacher researchers collecting data and publishing their findings on the BCTF website.

While the government once again ignored the findings of this research, the results have been extensively quoted by community groups advocating for students with special needs in the four years since their publication, and the replication of results arguably has led to a consensus that our findings – the various kinds of data including the stories related by teachers – reflect the results of changes that occurred because of government actions. BCTF advocacy based on the findings was limited and unsuccessful. No changes were effected because of the research.

But the research did change some of our thinking within the Research Division of the BCTF. Tired of collecting data to offer a case for action and change with no effect, we started to examine our own results and consider whether we could design inquiry projects that might address at least some of the issues raised. One issue was the massive exodus of
experienced specialists from Special Education, Learning Assistance, and ESL. By 2005 it became very clear that many such specialist teachers had tired of attempting to do the impossible and opted for classroom positions, which their seniority allowed them to do. Consequently, many Special Education positions became filled by new and inexperienced teachers.

One of the projects which forms one part of the empirical study in this research was initiated as a union inquiry project to address the issue of the exodus of experienced teachers and the influx of inexperienced teachers to the specialist support role in Special Education, Learning Assistance, and ESL. The mentoring/professional conversation project, initiated by the BCTF, invited Nanaimo, Coquitlam and Prince George school districts to partner with the union in addressing the issue by offering support groups with trained facilitators for those new (to the role or to teaching) Special Education teachers. Using inquiry approaches, encouraging reflection on practice, the groups collectively addressed issues and aimed to improve services for students.

I would argue that this reflects a major change in our inquiry approach, where our organizational inquiry both leads to further inquiry addressing an issue identified by earlier research, but also furthers the building of partnership with school districts. It makes the union part of a constructive solution, not just an identifier of problems, but it uses collaborative inquiry processes at every step, and builds capacity within the organization and within those participating at either stage. It builds school district capacity as teachers become more skilled mentors and facilitators in a professional
development experience, and builds confidence within teacher union and school district organizations that collaboration between them is possible and useful.

3.5 Reflections on the Four BCTF Projects, 1992-2002

The four inquiry approaches over ten years have produced progress in understanding and conducting collaborative teacher inquiry, so that it is possible to identify the year 2002 as a benchmark, with some capacity to articulate what had been learned. By this stage it was possible to offer some answers to the first of the questions guiding this study: What is the nature of collaborative teacher inquiry that has engaged teachers in BCTF Research projects? They shared certain common features:

- a group of 6-12 people meeting over time, with some release time provided
- informal, friendly yet challenging approaches
- facilitation and support from a ‘critical friend’
- a shift from isolation to collaboration, from private to public spaces
- peer conversations, with extensions of thinking and space for challenges
- the building of community within groups
- sharing through presentations and/or documentation in reports
- union funding and cross-divisional support (e.g. for producing reports)
- some sense of autonomy in terms of topic and reporting but collegial challenges within the discourse of the groups

I had learned more about how to combine teachers’ knowledge of classrooms and schools with my knowledge of inquiry approaches. A collaborative group approach had become the norm of inquiry, with the discourse within the group becoming critical to our learning. More had been learned about facilitation, finding that the same individual did not always need to be the facilitator, as others in the group might take on and share the facilitation role. Mistakes had been made, likely in all areas, but could adapt approaches so they were not repeated. There was an improved understanding that some of these projects were ‘purer’ teacher inquiry approaches in that they allowed teachers to generate
questions about practice, and to consider how to address them. Other projects were more akin to ‘applied’ teacher inquiry, using approaches including Case Studies, so there was not a sense that teacher inquiry had to follow any one method or approach, but could be adapted to teachers’ needs and educational contexts. Reporting was also a norm of the projects, and groups increasingly discussed their drafts before publishing their work. Reporting through documentation was not the only form of dissemination; however, as professional development activities were built into the Assessment project, and have expanded since 2002, as have other forms of presenting and sharing of approaches and findings. The focus on reporting and presenting reflected a consistent move into the more public space than that offered by the group, while participation in the group also reflected a shift out of teachers’ private and often isolated space. There was also a consistent theme of linking inquiry approaches to notions of good teaching, with all projects including a focus on student learning, and some on the contexts of teaching, both of which linked to Fenstermacher and Richardson’s (2005) description of good teaching.

In reflecting on this period of supporting teacher inquiry there’s also a sense that a great deal of facilitation involves sheer hard work - some of it very mundane. Supporting inquiry groups requires organization and management - arranging time releases, booking rooms, fixing meeting dates, photocopying of documents, taking and keying in notes, considerable communication by phone and e-mail, arranging food deliveries. Working for the BCTF there was some support for this work so that other BCTF could take some of this load, but nevertheless a mass of mundane tasks need to be completed if teacher inquiry is to proceed let alone succeed. When looking at the literature on inquiry and
teacher research, little of this is addressed, yet without this kind of organization and management, inquiry groups are unlikely to be successful.

In terms of patterns, the similarity between projects was the concept of teachers examining the practices and contexts of their work in collaborative groups with some level of facilitation and support provided by the union. Yet each project was different in its focus and approach, largely because each was planned by those teachers in the particular project. I believe, looking back on these projects, that the framework of teacher inquiry is sufficiently broad to incorporate multiple methods and to be adapted by different groups of teachers depending on focus and context. There are some core elements - collaborative discussion, facilitation, data collection and reflection - but many ways to adapt these elements to the particular needs of the teachers involved. The wide range of focus and contexts is likely one argument against a narrow methodological approach such as that advocated in some of the early Action Research literature. The four projects considered here show that a variety of methods can engage teachers in successful inquiry addressing a range of issues and practices.

The data also show a determination within the BCTF to foster and develop teacher inquiry, and to improve skills and capacity within the union to engage teachers, to manage research, and to publish and disseminate findings. By collecting and analyzing data from the 1992-2002 period, it is possible to argue that skills were developed and capacity generated. But there is also some evidence that a higher plane of knowledge and understanding is possible which can be built on the experience of learning from our inquiry approaches. This evidence comes from our identification of the possible
importance of conversation, of distributing leadership within groups, or of going public, without a fuller exploration and understanding of what those areas involved.
CHAPTER IV  The Multiliteracies Project, 2002-2006

When the Multiliteracies project started in 2002, considerable experience had been acquired over ten years of union-initiated inquiry projects. As stated above, some common aspects of teacher inquiry as they had occurred in union projects had been identified and articulated. Thus, within the union there was an improved understanding of the nature of teacher inquiry because of these experiences. BCTF inquiry projects between 1992 and 2002 provided data with which to partly answer the first research question in the first phase of this study ‘What is the nature of collaborative teacher inquiry that has engaged teachers in BCTF Research projects?’ Articulation of the nature of such inquiry became a foundation on which to build greater understanding of inquiry approaches and concepts during the four years of the Multiliteracies project.

While the four BCTF projects provided some initial insight into the second and third research questions, the start of the Multiliteracies project was the point at which the second and third questions were addressed in greater detail. This was approached through a more extensive data collection and analysis approach in the second phase of this research between 2002 and 2006. The four-year period of research therefore added to an understanding of the nature of collaborative inquiry (Research Question 1) and started the process of better understanding data which could answer the second and third research questions. The second and third questions were:

- How valuable is teacher inquiry in supporting teachers’ learning and professional development?
- How does collaborative teacher inquiry move teachers into a more public space, and why might that have value for those engaged and for the systems in which they work?
The Multiliteracies project’s official title was ‘From Literacy to Multiliteracies: Designing Learning Environments for the Knowledge Economy’. The research was funded by the Canadian federal research agency, the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). The research project explored and described teachers’ inquiry into their Multiliteracies practices in 15 elementary and secondary schools in the Vancouver School District, BC, Canada, and involved three partners in BC: the University of British Columbia (UBC), the Vancouver School Board (VSB) and the provincial teachers’ union, the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation (BCTF).

I was the BCTF contact for this project, and represented the organization in planning and managing the research. But I was also involved as a PhD graduate student at UBC, acting in the capacity of Research Assistant. In this role, I was involved in three projects, all connected in different ways to the use of visual images in elementary school classrooms. All three projects involved collaborations between myself and one or more teachers using visual images in their teaching, and linking such use to Multiliteracies concepts. The New London Group (1996) stated their view of what constituted Multiliteracies concepts:

Two main arguments, then, emerged in our discussions. The first relates to the increasing multiplicity and integration of significant modes of meaning-making where the textual is also related to the visual, the audio, the spatial, the behavioral, and so on. This is particularly important in the mass media, multimedia and in an electronic hypermedia. We may have cause to be skeptical about the sci-fi visions of information superhighways and an impending future where we are all virtual shoppers. Nevertheless, new communications media are reshaping the ways we use language. Where technologies of meaning are changing so rapidly, there cannot be one set of standards or skills that constitute the ends of literacy learning, however taught (p. 65).

The New London Group discussed this view of literacy in a context of social and cultural diversity in a globally-connected world. The projects in Vancouver schools in which I worked all in some way reflected the New London Group’s definitions because they
included the use of multiple approaches to building meaning-making and literacy, in particular the use of visual images. They also reflected the Group’s view of societies reflecting social and cultural diversity, with all projects located in the Vancouver School District, with approximately 150 languages spoken by students in the district’s schools.

The three projects were:

- Video production and media analysis by students in a district program for Gifted students;
- Use of conventional and digital drawing, and digital photography to explore Social Responsibility issues in one school; and
- Use of Picture Communication Symbols with elementary students in two schools

Of these three projects, I have selected the Picture Communication Symbols project as the major source of data for this study. There are several reasons for this. It was the longest in duration, allowing for significant data collection and the writing of a Case Study. It involved four educators, in addition to myself, as the research team, making it the largest and most diverse group of the three listed above. One classroom teacher, one Resource teacher (a term used to identify a teacher offering one or all of the following: Special Education, Learning Assistance, ESL services and support to both classroom teachers and students), and two Speech-Language Pathologists also reflected diversity of roles and of experience.

Starting this project in 2002 came after many years of involvement in teacher inquiry projects. I believe that my participation in this project benefited from my cumulative learning and experience over time. Some of the factors involved learning and experience gained in earlier projects, especially in terms of facilitation and in terms of starting the project with some expectations (reporting) but with structures and processes that could be guided by the group rather than being imposed by me. Decisions in these areas that were
collective rather than individual included meeting times and locations, areas of focus and data collection, and control over content in the report. Three of us in a group of five had worked together over time, and had previously published reports. So at the start there existed factors which helped the group start with some confidence, and expand its membership to include two teachers not formerly part of inquiry approaches. But there were many things learned during this project. Looking back on the empirical data from 1992-2002, the year 2002 represents a benchmark date, at which point the inquiry projects had been defined at least in terms of some components. In addition to the components, or nature of collaborative inquiry, some skills had been developed, for example in terms of facilitation or reporting. Thus, the benchmark of 2002 reflects a clearer definition and understanding of the nature of collaborative inquiry, but also a point at which skills and capacity could also be identified and listed.

At the start of the Multiliteracies project, I felt that we as a group started to undertake our inquiry in a different way than had been my experience in earlier BCTF research projects. We started to consider the importance of context in understanding practice, and about our own practices and experiences within such contexts. We also started to think more about how conversation developed understanding and might enable us to move from discourse to publication, from our somewhat isolated and private spaces to a more public space within the group, then beyond the group through publication and presentation. Just as the first phase of the research provided some understanding of the nature of collaborative inquiry, so the second phase signaled the start of a period in which data collection and analysis might both add to the understanding of the nature of collaborative inquiry (Research Question 1), and to inform the second and third research questions; these
concerned the move into more public space, and the potential value of such a move for participants and the systems in which they worked.

In order to understand the learning from this particular inquiry experience, and to answer Research Questions 2 and 3, the following Case Study describes the project and explores some of these themes. The Case Study tells two stories. The first is about the actual focus of inquiry – the use of Picture Communication Symbols in two Vancouver elementary schools. The second story is about a shift from considering data which focus on the use of picture symbols towards considering data about the inquiry process in which we were involved. The inquiry was initially unstructured. We started with videotaped conversations about the use of picture symbols, and then moved into a consideration of context. Some understanding of context was provided by observation, by our discussion within the research group, and by interviews with the principals from the two schools. The videotapes allowed us to use our conversations as data for drafting the first part of the Case Study. Then we made a claim about the use of picture symbols, and decided how to collect evidence, by observation in schools, by teaching and filming classes, by viewing the filmed data and engaging in reflective and analytic conversations about the classes (the discussions also being filmed). All of these data provided material from which the Case Study was written. Then, as we reached a stage where we had a greater understanding of the picture symbols, we realized that our conversations were inadvertently shifting to reflecting on the inquiry process itself. We discussed the nature of our conversations, and about the shift we were observing in that we were moving increasingly out of private space and into more public spaces through our discussions in the group. Such a shift was not at the expense of our discussions about the use of the
symbols in the two schools. It was an extension of our thinking in the sense that discussions often combined a focus on the symbols and their use, and on the inquiry process. The major shift was that in the early part of the project our focus was almost exclusively on the symbols, while by the end we were focusing almost totally on the inquiry process. However, for most of the time the dual areas of focus – symbols and inquiry co-existed and coalesced in our research. The Case Study below tells the two stories, and in so doing provides some increased understanding of answers to the second and third research questions.

A Case Study: The use of Picture Communication Symbols in two elementary schools.

What are Picture Communication Symbols?

Picture Communication Symbols (PCS) are computer-generated symbols which combine images and words and are being used to support classroom organization, literacy and expressive communication. In this study, our focus was on one form of Picture Communication Symbols called ‘Boardmaker’, which is a commercial product manufactured and distributed by Mayer-Johnson.  

Starting the research

As we started the project, there were many rich discussions where the group considered how the symbols were being used, and if their use impacted student learning. The following two quotes from participants in the project illustrate the use of picture symbols with students with limited language capacity, and demonstrated how the symbols effectively included them in learning:

Some children do not have a language base - and they're not ready for writing yet. So I can get them to cut out pictures and fit them into a sentence pattern. They’re

http://www.mayer-johnson.com/MainBoardmaker.aspx?MainCategoryID=5419
showing concept comprehension, and they are participating rather than attempting things they cannot do (T3). 9

We had a student who did not know what to do when there was a fire drill. He'd hear the bell and panic, and he couldn't follow the teacher's instructions, or the routine established, even after years of practice. So we looked at the steps in the fire drill - five in this case - and designed a 'fire drill' sheet using Picture Communication Symbols. The same was done for earthquake drill, and we placed them in every classroom. The individual student for whom we designed the sheet became much more familiar with what he had to do as he could follow the five steps when they were visually represented. Now even students in Grade 7 refer to the drill sheets as needed (T1).

The discussions at the start of the research therefore focused on practice, which involved some consideration of individual teaching philosophies and approaches that each person used in schools, and in particular discussing their use of the picture symbols. These reflections linked the application of picture symbols to student participation in class as a pre-requisite to student learning. Some students, without the use of picture symbols, had limited capacity to engage either because of limited cognitive or language capacity. By engaging them through picture symbols, participation and some learning was possible, and this was explored in the conversation. Many of the instances recalled were specific moments or times when the teachers could consider an incident, and relate it to the use of symbols while considering why it had utility for the students concerned. One example might be the child who could not understand the verbal instructions for a fire drill but could follow the visual steps produced using picture symbols. In another case, language extension was possible when picture symbols were used to prompt written language by providing visual images that could be verbalized by students, then written. This way of exploring the particular instances therefore allowed for a focus but also served as an entry point for discussion and reflection. It started the journey from private space to more public discussion by sharing instances of practice. It also started our constant ‘So what?’

9 Identifiers: T1 - first teacher, T2 - second teacher, etc. M - Moderator
question. ‘So what?’ was our way of linking the application to whether benefits to students’ learning were actually happening. It was also an entry point to discussing the purposes of schooling. If we could ask the ‘So what?’ question to ascertain if learning was taking place, we could ask the same question to move from consideration of means (learning) to consideration of ends (purposes of schooling).

**Understanding context**

As we started to explore such instances, we realized that all such practices were set in particular contexts, and we returned to consider how much of an influence such contexts might be. As an example of one discussion of context, one participant spoke of practices in her school using the analogy of nuclear and extended families. In some cases, the students were in their classroom (the nuclear family), and in other cases, they were grouped in an arrangement where students from other classes were combined (the extended family):

One of the things my school’s been doing last year is family groupings. Every Friday from K - Gr. 7, for 40 minutes. We group all the kids in the school into what we call a family group so there’s kids in there from K-7 and every teacher has a group that they stay with throughout the year. They do a values-oriented lesson with them, whatever the value of the month is, and that becomes the lesson and so it is sending the message. So the students go to a different teacher, all mixed grades. It’s the analogy of nuclear and extended family - the nuclear family being the individual classroom, but the extended family where everyone takes a little bit of responsibility for looking after the kids (T2).

**The schools**

The first context we started to consider and discuss was the schools in which four of five members of the research team worked. What did we know or could find out about the nature of the student population, the communities served, and the approaches and philosophies within the schools? This focus on context was not altogether only at the start of the research. Once we had considered some basic information about the student
population, and of the community, we moved away from this context, only to return as we found aspects of context influencing practices. The two schools in this study were Mt. Pleasant Elementary, and Renfrew Elementary, both in east Vancouver, and are described below.

**Mount Pleasant Elementary School**

Located in the Mount Pleasant area, on the east side of Vancouver, the school has (at the time of writing) a population of 310 students in Grades K-7. With 30 languages used by students, approximately 25% of the students speak English as a first language, the other most commonly spoken first languages being Mandarin/Cantonese (20%), Tagalog (19%), Vietnamese (8%), Spanish (5%). 180 students, 58% of the school’s population, receive ESL support, and 17 (5.5%) are identified as students with special needs. Mt. Pleasant is a designated inner-city school, with both breakfast and hot lunch programs. Although the school clearly services one of the poorer areas of the city, the atmosphere in the school is upbeat and welcoming. Diversity here is clearly viewed as an asset, not only in the wall displays, but in the respectful way that students are treated in the course of each day.

The school’s design is open-plan, so there are no walls around classrooms. There is some evidence that this design may have encouraged the dissemination and sharing of ideas regarding the use of picture communication symbols. Over time, various teachers saw the picture communication symbols on the open-plan walls, and often asked questions about them. Ensuing discussions then resulted in teachers deciding to use the picture communication symbols or adapting an existing approach to a different need in their

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10 The use of the real names of the schools was approved in ethics approval processes of the school district and UBC.
classes. But the open-plan design also facilitated informal and regular movement of staff and students in the school, making contact and conversations somewhat easier than may be the case in schools where each teacher has an enclosed classroom space.

Another important context in Mt. Pleasant Elementary was the Principal of the school. The following provides some sense of how he supports the work of teachers using picture symbols, but also challenges them:

Three words exemplify John's approach to being a Principal: passion, vision and effort. Guiding each is a question around all ideas and actions: what does this (idea/action) do to support students' learning? A guiding theme is respect for the children, the staff and the community. His passion is clear as he discusses teachers' work, or the progress of individual students. His vision is reflected when he spoke of the "flattened hierarchy" in the school, and how he learns, from teachers, from students, from community. He sees his role as facilitative of teacher initiatives, such as Karen's work with picture communication symbols, with the outcome due to a "ripple" effect when initiatives take hold and are shared among staff. He spoke of "providing the oil" to keep things moving, of trying to see things in different ways, using the metaphor of "taking the glasses off" and seeing how things looked. "Oil" in some cases involved finding resources needed by teachers, whether actual funds or release time, some provided by his covering classes for teachers. In his discussions with teachers, the conversations include both explorations and challenges of ideas. Such challenges are a way of making sure that ideas are sound enough to withstand the challenge, and are not just accepted at face value. Will proposals work? What's the benefit for students? Why adopt a particular approach? Such debates ensure ideas are tested, sifted, seriously considered before being used with students (Retrieved from field notes).

Renfrew Elementary School

The school is part of the Renfrew-Collingwood community on the slopes of east Vancouver. It is located in an area that is both residential and commercial. Renfrew Community Centre, Renfrew Public Library, and Falaise Park are situated nearby. Most students live within walking distance of the school. Renfrew Elementary is a designated neighbourhood school and was built in 1928. It has a main building with self-contained
classrooms in a three storey structure. A new two storey primary wing was built and added to the main building in 2003.

One of the larger Vancouver elementary schools, Renfrew has a student population of 549 students. There are 22 first languages spoken in the school, the most common being Cantonese/Mandarin (50%), English (21%), Vietnamese (12%), and Punjabi (4%). 50% of the students receive ESL support. A Heritage Cantonese class and a Greek class are held in the school once a week. There are after school programs, such as Windermere Community Programs that students from the school and the community can attend.

Renfrew has a significant number of students with special needs (7%) enrolled in both regular and district classes. While most students with special needs are integrated into regular classes, there are a few District classes designed primarily for students with special needs. There are 23 divisions of students ranging from Kindergarten to Grade Seven, three of which are district classes (Primary Special Remedial, Intermediate Special Remedial, and Life Skills).

Renfrew Elementary’s motto is ‘Renfrew Cares’. One way that Renfrew Elementary builds a sense of community within the school and promotes the motto is at the weekly Friday assemblies. At each assembly, there are performances by different classes, school singing, music, and awards for students to celebrate, appreciate, and congratulate the achievements and displays of citizenship by the students.

We found in examining the schools as context that the schools differed considerably, and we had a sense that one school seemed more open and collaborative than the other. In
order to explore this further we expanded our exploration of context. We then considered what contexts might be relevant to consider, beyond our initial exploration of school population and community. Three contextual factors were explored in the project: the design and layout of the schools; the roles of educators; and the service delivery model.

Consideration of these three factors suggested differences in both physical design and levels of collaboration, with the open-plan design of one school also being a site of greater collaboration with more shared and public space, while the separate classrooms and walls of the second school were a place in which more teachers worked individually and collaborated less:

Yes, and we’ve had that conversation before about the physical environment at Mount Pleasant, and the fact that it has no walls. You want to talk about collaboration, you want to talk about people who have to develop the skill set to get along. There are no doors to close so you end up for better or worse having fuzzier boundaries. I can walk past a classroom - I see a kid doing something, I stop and address the issue, and it’s not just one teacher’s problem and so it’s a shared thing and the teacher isn’t offended that I stopped and said to the kids, ‘No, you can’t have your toys in the hall.’ So I think it starts with collaboration at all levels with really tiny little things, it doesn’t start with solving one big issue around one child that’s a complex child. I think the culture of collaboration starts at very tiny little things like ‘Are we all responsible for all the children in the entire building?’ And how do you include all the support staff in a school into more conversation about being a professional environment in that school (T1).

Three different roles were reflected in the participants’ jobs – one classroom teacher, one Resource teacher and two Speech-Language Pathologists.

Both schools have shared services from the two Speech and Language Pathologists who formed part of this research team and who were employed by the Vancouver School Board. They are largely responsible for the introduction of picture communication symbols and Boardmaker software in both schools. The administration of Mount Pleasant has had a long standing commitment to maximizing the amount of Speech Language
therapy services that could be provided in the school with extra funds from inner-city school funding. There was a recognition on the part of the administration and with support of the staff to use some of the available funding to provide more Speech Language time in the school because of the significant number of low incidence students with communication difficulties, the number of language delays in high incidence students and the impact of ESL upon students' language development. (In BC, the term 'low' incidence refers to those designated as students with special needs, low in numbers, but high-cost services per student. ‘High’ incidence refers to students with special needs whose numbers are higher, but with less cost to provide support per student.)

With the Speech Language Pathologists' interest in using visual symbols both as a support for developing language, and for supporting the acquisition of English language, they initially engaged teams of educators from schools in conversations about how visual symbols might support both language and learning. Participants in conversations included classroom and resource teachers, Speech Language Pathologists, and teacher assistants. They then worked with educators to use the Boardmaker software to produce picture communication symbols for individual students, small group or whole class instruction. The presence, roles and approaches of the Speech Language Pathologists reflect another context in terms of roles that we started to better understand through observation and discussion.

In terms of understanding the context of service delivery, Mount Pleasant Elementary School has a long standing history of an inclusive Resource Team model. Resource teachers are assigned to classrooms where in collaboration with the classroom teacher,
they address learning for all students. The class teacher and resource teacher determine what the needs of the class are and how they are going to meet them, whether it is in small groups, co-teaching or some one-to-one support if needed. This model has been in place at Mount Pleasant for approximately ten years and as a result there is a long-standing practice of collaboration and sharing between all teachers. This affords an opportunity to not only have conversations about individual student needs, but to also address broader issues in terms of the approach used in each class.

In contrast, Renfrew Elementary has a specialist model for delivering resource services, such as ESL, Learning Assistance, and Special Needs. For each of these resource areas, there are specialist teachers. The specialist teachers provide services to specifically assigned students by pullouts and in-class support. When systems and programs that use picture communication symbols are implemented for specific children, they usually are only tailored to meet the needs of those particular children. In addition, other students who do not receive additional support will be less likely to be exposed to picture communication symbols. Because there are two different models for delivering services at Renfrew Elementary and Mount Pleasant Elementary, the difference in models has created variation in how children are exposed to picture communication symbols.

The description above, masks the significance of context which emerged during our conversations. Each of these areas of context was explored, and discussed many times. We started to understand that there were many contexts – buildings, service delivery and roles/relationships - these simply being organizers for a range of factors and issues that emerged during our discussions. As an example, the issue of working relationships was
positively linked to relationships within the group but each participant had experienced
more negative working relationships. Positive relationships led to informal and
collaborative processes which were of benefit to students because services appeared more
cohesively offered and more quickly adapted. By better understanding context, we
understood more of a particular context's effects on how services to students might be
impacted, and how members of the research team were affected, positively and
negatively.

Each time our understanding of context grew, and such growth occurred because of the
conversation. We started to understand that in some cases context might be something
outside of our control. The physical design of buildings, for instance, was not of our
doing. Yet in some ways we found that teachers in one location had used such design to
their advantage, in that the open spaces led to open viewing of picture symbols, and
frequent informal conversations among teachers sharing the same space. In the other
school, the closed doors and walled classrooms seemed to reflect a more private, less
public approach to teaching and learning within the school itself. In some cases, context
was not about a building but about relationships between educators:

M: There's an issue - the problem of the child's learning, the time that you take to
look at what that is, and during that time there are these relationships between the
adults in the school. What does that mix look like?

T1: For me it's about the conversation - it's the same thing that J's saying, and
depending on where that child is, in the system, in the big system, in this whole
system and in the classroom, those relationships can affect how you start to do
what you do. When you're thinking about relationships or collaboration in that
school that has that openness, you can go in a way that's much less formal, much
less systemically structured. You can just start doing what we're doing here, just
see what you think, and that's part of that assessment, everybody has input to the
information and your classroom is part of an assessment and have everybody
understanding that. In other places my experience is that people have a pre-
conceived notion of what I should be doing and they feel quite strongly about
what I should be doing. And that relationship is a much more difficult one if I am not seeing things from the same perspective they are. And that's the relationship part that can be a challenge compared to the way that I think professionally should be the way to go about doing something.

T2: And given that, and given all of those system delivery issues that impact on how you're able to collaborate, to have conversations, it then influences how you put a plan into place, how you're able to hold the dialogue and what that dialogue is going to sound like or feel like to people. A lot of times I understand that consultation should not happen in the hallway for five minutes on the fly, and we all understand that it does. It's that informal piece of the conversation where people feel they're being attended to in some shape or form and that it doesn't always have to be this formalized time when everyone can sit down and do this. But that's also a part of it. I also understand the flip side of that is that how do you document all the recommendations (from informal processes). Does every single thing need to be documented? That whole other part of the accountability piece that comes into play too. All of those things impinge on not just collaboration but on how you implement and put whatever plan you have into action. I don't know that you can pull them apart.

M: So here's something about formality and informality, and the ease of starting the conversations and where formal and informal structures can play a role.

We discussed whether physical context caused or reflected private or public approaches, and how working relationships impacted on the roles and practices, without any clear or definitive conclusion. The key factor for us was in understanding more of the context through the conversation, that each time we discussed context we understood more about its influence, and about our ability to consider whether we could use context productively (chats between teachers in open space; the visibility of the picture symbols in such space), or whether we were controlled by it (closed walls limiting collaboration).

Over time, we started to understand through the conversation that roles and service delivery models were contexts over which the participants had some control. As we discussed context, one realization became more clear - that some context may be within or outside of individual control. Could we initiate action to compensate for context? Did
we use favourable contexts to our advantage? Did we feel some contexts were so
dominant that they could not be countered or compensated for?

We felt that, through our conversations, we had better understood context and its
influence. By understanding the influence of context more clearly, participants also felt
more able to consider levels of control and influence, thereby compensating for context
or changing those practices which seemed controlled by context. One example of this was
the teacher in the more ‘private’ school who initiated her own network within the school
of like-minded teachers to share strategies and ideas, while also reflecting on practice. By
setting up such a network, she refused to allow context to keep her in an isolated space
and control her desire for community and collaboration. Her initially private world
became somewhat more public through a conscious act. Our understanding of her actions
became clearer through conversation. In some cases, the clarity came through an
individual simply recounting a story or a sequence of events, in other instances it came
more through the exchange of comments. In one instance where simply telling the story
was sufficient to gain understanding, a teacher spoke of her frustration in trying to meet
the needs of some students. Unsure of what to do in some cases, she had arranged a
series of meetings with specialist staff. After many meetings with little concrete support
she almost gave up:

Because of the frustration I experienced in the classroom for a variety of reasons,
I think as a teacher or an educator - or whatever role you have - you can either
continue, continue, continue to fight for the needs of the child or you can just
throw your hands up and say “I cannot do this.” And I’ve seen both situations
happen with this child. Some people said it can be so frustrating, putting so much
emotionally into this. And how do we support those people so they don’t throw
their hands in the air (i.e. give up).
However, by being selective in her choices of peers with whom she chose to, the teacher was able to find a more supportive space to discuss issues and practices:

T1: Because there are people - the school environment is not conducive to collaborative work. However, within my school the reason I continue to stay is because the people I work with directly and who I choose to work with. I work extremely well with them. So that's the reason I continue to stay in that environment because I have created an individual little circle that I feel comfortable with. I choose now not to go into the staffroom. I go to my classroom, go to certain places, talk to certain people, and that's it. Because I don't want to get involved in conflict. I'm there to work with the children and to work with the people I need to, to get the services for the children.

I could talk to the counsellor, the librarian, the other kindergarten teachers - because we as a group of K teachers we decided we wanted to work well together so though we have different views we share - we meet monthly to get together to share ideas and give each other things and we've created a very happy place. And that's about it.

And if I need to talk to somebody else - it's not that I don't get on with others - I choose not to participate because of things that have happened in the school.

C: So you're exercising some choice?

T1: Yes.

It also became clearer that as we discussed practices we were also discussing what we believed a good school to be. A good school in our view was an inclusive school that involved all students in learning, and the four educators' practices were fundamentally designed to maximize every student's participation and learning. This view of the purpose of schooling closely matches one view of the purpose of schooling to be maximizing participation in civil society by making schools a place where all students were engaged and participating.

**Making a claim about the use of PCS**

The making of a claim in this collaborative inquiry project reflected a shift in inquiry methods. It occurred because of discussions with the Multiliteracies team at UBC, rather
than emerging from the picture symbols group. As a group we were considering approaches to inquiry and considered that stating claims was one way to explore an approach. It allowed for data collection against the claim as a reference point. The approach was not forced onto individual inquiry groups but was offered as a consideration. The picture symbols group was enthusiastic to use the approach because it focused our search for evidence. Making a claim was not the first step in our providing evidence to prove the claim but a starting point for exploration, questioning, discussions and observations. The claim could be proven right or wrong, but the richness of the inquiry as we explored practices, roles and context, was to prove of greater interest to us than a simplistic validation or rejection of a claim.

By stating the claim, the group started collecting data which connected to the second and third research questions in this study. By collecting data on teaching approaches, such as filming classes, we reflected on practice which linked to our learning. By understanding more about this learning, we were able to consider the utility of our inquiry as professional development. In discussing practices, we discussed what we thought constituted good schools.

After these early conversations thinking and talking about how PCS were used, and thinking more about the contexts in which they were used, the five-person research group discussed how to plan and to execute our research. This apparently simple transition also masks what may be a key factor in the collaborative research process. We were not sure of our approach and methods until we engaged in conversation. We had no pre-determined hypothesis, just an interest in a particular pedagogical approach and a desire
to better understand what it involved and whether it worked as well as we thought it did. The preliminary conversations helped us to better identify some focus for our research while also building relationships within the group. It was a chance for those new to this kind of group to gauge its utility for them, and a chance for those who had worked together previously to adjust to new members. The combination of ‘wondering about a practice’ - the use of picture symbols - and the evolving conversation are perhaps two factors that helped us to start becoming more cohesive as a group, to explore an issue and to focus on a claim. It also gave us some time to build confidence, gaining a sense that we could both contribute and gain from the collective inquiry experience.

We had decided to make a tentative claim about Picture Communication Symbols based on the teachers’ experience of their use. The claim was stated as:

Picture Communication Symbols as used by the members of the group supported all students’ learning in elementary classrooms.

The claim was tentative, because we wanted to explore whether this was the case; therefore, we planned observation of classes followed by reflections within the group, in order to explore the claim.

The statement of a claim involved going public through the claim. Initially, the public space in which the claim was made consisted of the inquiry group. Making the claim public in the group allowed us to search for evidence, and encouraged our reflections on practice. Making the claim stimulated and focused conversation because it gave us a reference point to guide and gauge our inquiry. As we tested the claim by searching for evidence, we kept referring back to the claim to check relevance in the inquiry process. Was the evidence we were collecting linked to the claim? How and why? Did the
evidence support or challenge the claim? How and why? Thus, the claim became central to the inquiry process in this project.

In order to test and reflect on the claim that Picture Communication Symbols as used by the members of the group supported all students’ learning in elementary classrooms, the group decided to explore the claim in three areas where picture communication symbols are used with a whole class or group of students. The three areas to be addressed were:

1. Comprehension of information used every day in classes
2. Literacy in a regular curriculum and classroom context
3. Expressive Communication

Comprehension of information used every day in classes
Both teachers use picture communication symbols to organize and manage time and activities in their classes. These can include “Shape of the Day” which is a visual organizer that can be accessed by the whole class at any stage during the day. A bank of images with the corresponding words is made by the teacher and can be quickly placed on the wall or board each morning. If the schedule is not in place by 9.00 a.m., some students often ask the teacher where it is. During observations in the classes where “Shape of the Day” was being used, many students accessed the organizer whenever they needed to check the schedule. Such checks only took a few seconds, yet students, with this and other picture communication symbols organizers, used them individually and independently, checking or reinforcing their comprehension.

Literacy in a regular curriculum and classroom context
BC schools, like schools anywhere, teach a curriculum which is prescribed. For many teachers, the curriculum content focus is a constant in their teaching. How, then, are picture communication symbols used in the regular teaching of curriculum content in an elementary classroom?
In this section of the report we consider the use of picture communication symbols by one of the teachers within a regular English Language Arts curriculum unit: Using a story to build understanding and writing skills. In teaching this curriculum unit we observed a sequence of events, individual and collaborative roles, and explicit use of visuals and language used either with the whole class or individually. The unit was collaboratively planned and involved three staff members: the classroom teacher, the resource teacher and the teacher assistant. Each considered the content and sequence, and what role they would take during each stage of the unit being taught.

The resource teacher introduces the unit to the students, explaining that during the story students will be drawing what they heard in terms of what the characters saw, felt, heard and tasted. Each student has a sheet produced by the resource teacher with boxes in which to draw their pictures.

Then the classroom teacher reads the first part of the story, showing some images from the story book, telling a story of a young Inuit girl who wants to be a carver. The young girl undertakes a journey required before she can be accepted as a carver. It is the images evoked from this part of the story that the students then draw. There are different levels of comprehension, and different applications in the class. Each of the three staff circulates through the room, assisting and encouraging all the students. In the same way that the unit is taught to all students, all students receive individual help from one or all of the three staff.
Switching back to the whole class, the resource teacher asks the students to share some of the images. On chart paper at the front to the class, which all the students can see, there are the classifications of “see”, “hear”, “feel”, “smell”, represented both as words and symbols. The first image elicited from students in the class is “Ocean”, which is fitted into the section on the chart paper. The resource teacher adds a visual image of “ocean” to the chart paper, then elicits an adjective (“blue”) before adding that word on the chart paper, so that students start to see adjectives added to the noun (blue ocean). She does the same thing eliciting spoken words which become both symbol and written words with subsequent images. Each word is extended by the teacher after eliciting the words from students, so that the idea and language for a shelter is stated and drawn, as is the igloo as the form of shelter evoked from the story. As the teacher elicits images she redraws them on the sheet until each of the categories has a number of words and images to reflect the ideas generated by the students. Gradually, the chart paper has a range of images and words in each of the four categories. From the bank of images and words, students are encouraged to generate “powerful sentences”. Thus the picture symbols are used to identify and label with language an object (fish), and build an understanding of where the fish swims (ocean) while extending the students’ vocabulary and writing skills (the fish swam in the blue ocean). Just as the bank of words and images were developed in a way that involved the whole class, so too is the concept of “powerful sentences” (sentences with extended vocabulary and expression) developed incrementally and co-operatively, students adding words to a simple sentence until they are rich and evocative. “The seal swam” becomes, after several stages of student input, “The happy seal swiftly swam through the dark blue ocean.”

Expressive Communication
All students need strategies for developing and extending their communication with peers and with adults. An example of using picture communication symbols for developing expressive language is “sharing” in Deborah’s kindergarten class. Each child is assigned a day in which he/she brings an object to share with other students. The purpose of this activity is to develop speaking skills in describing an object, asking and answering questions, giving directions, and engaging in meaningful conversations. The format of this activity is different from typical approaches where students stand in front of the class and share their object. Instead, Deborah has the students sit in four small groups, on the carpet and the children who are sharing rotate through the four groups. Therefore each child, while sharing, practices skills of expressive language, such as questioning and engaging in conversation, four different times with four different groups of students.

Picture Communication Symbols are introduced to support students’ in their expressive language in two ways during these activities. A “Speaker Card” and a “Listener Card” are used to create conversational scripts. These cards with both symbols and words have scripts on what each student needs to do during sharing. For instance, on the speaker card, one of the scripts is to “Say 3 things.” This is followed by prompts for students as to ideas that they can say about their object. On the listener card, there is a script of “Ask questions?” which is followed by prompts as to what questions students can ask. Students at various levels of expressive language can benefit from these cards. Students with limited expressive language have visual cues as to what to say in the activity. Students with greater skills of expressive language can use the visuals on the cards as examples of what information can be said and then expand the discussion by bringing in their own questions, ideas, or comments. Finally, the use of the cards and the structure of the
sharing allow students to be in charge of an activity and to use expressive language to
direct and instruct other students in the activity. Sharing is an activity that is meaningful
to students that draws upon their prior knowledge and builds on their existing skills as they practice expressive language in a natural way.

For each area, members of the research team collaboratively planned examples to
demonstrate the use of picture communication symbols. Next, the teachers decided which examples would be best suited to use at their schools. Members of the team then used the picture symbols in classes, often with other members of the team observing. Finally, a reflection meeting was held where we all considered how the picture communication symbols were used, and how effective they were in promoting comprehension, literacy or expressive communication. We did this by reviewing videotape of the lessons, and by reviewing our field notes, both of which fed into many rich discussions about the classes observed.

Thus, the research team identified the three areas listed above (comprehension, literacy, expressive communication), observed and filmed classroom lessons where picture symbols were used in the three areas. The research team viewed the video data in reflection meetings, and used data from the filmed sessions to consider the utility of the approaches using picture symbols. As an example, the team looked for at the video data for situations where students might access picture symbols without the teacher’s prompt, or where students were engaged in small group discussion using the picture symbols. We did this because we wanted to consider whether there might be extensions of the use of picture symbols that were not teacher-directed. In viewing self-directed access to the symbols we could also consider who and how many in the classes was accessing them in
this way, checking these findings against our claim that all students in the class used the symbols in ways that supported their learning.

Initial discussion identified such uses of symbols, and we considered how they included students when they might otherwise have been excluded. But as the project continued we noticed an expansion of our focus which occurred during group discussions. Picture symbols are a tool, and with the tool of picture symbols, these teachers were including many more students in learning than before. The tool, once explained and understood, became less of a focus for the group than did the contexts and applications. And then, once the contexts and applications were explored through discussion, our group turned to discussions about teaching and learning, which their use of picture symbols was reflecting. Thus, conversation allowed for shifts from the particular examples of using picture communication symbols to consideration of student learning, and approaches to teaching which were collaborative and which focused on best meeting students' needs.

As an example, one participant spoke of her preference to work using symbols with teachers in their classrooms rather than pull out students from the class:

If I pull a child out who's had a communication difficulty and do something one-on-one, we have a child who is not communicating effectively in the classroom setting, and so what I do with that child may not be generalizable into that classroom setting at all. So maybe I need to step back from that thinking and ask what is happening in that classroom and what does that child need in terms of understanding what's going on, and in terms of participating in the class. And so that becomes interesting to me, and that's the place I would want to dialogue with the classroom teacher, the resource teacher, and create an understanding of the interactive environment, and to create strategies that are going to make a difference to that child, for that child to understand the flows of the classroom, and to be able to take be in on the routines of the classroom and to be able to participate. To me those are really important conversations and a place we can bring all our knowledge for that to happen.
This reflects a strong focus on individual student needs and a perceived need and preference for dialogue with other educators on how to meet such needs collectively and collaboratively. It links to the group’s earlier consideration of a good school being inclusive, and meeting the needs of all students.

A claim was made that picture communication symbols could be successfully used in elementary classrooms to develop comprehension, literacy and expressive communication for a wide range of students with diverse abilities. The larger Case Study (on the project’s web site) explored, and provided evidence in support of that claim. From data collected in the three areas of focus, there was considerable evidence in film footage and observed many times by the group’s external researcher, of students’ active engagement through the use of picture symbols in learning, individually, in small groups, and with a whole class. This learning was in terms of concept development, oral communication, and written expression. From reflective discussions, the teachers involved in this research identified specific examples of students’ using picture symbols to advance conceptual understanding, communication skills and language acquisition.

The school principal provided evidence of the successful use of picture symbols throughout the school, and stated his belief that the use of symbols promoted both engagement and learning. The research team carefully reflected on the film data, and on our observations, and concluded that picture symbols supported learning for a wide range of learners in the three areas explored. Additional evidence for this claim was also provided in instances where students self-referenced picture symbols, used them in small group discussions, or successfully used symbols to communicate information such as ‘finish’ when the concept was difficult to communicate using language.
Yet we did not have external validation of such examples, nor could we directly link the use of picture symbols to measured outcomes of student learning. It could be argued that because of the limits of our inquiry, we should limit the claims being made. Yet as team, we felt reluctant to do so. While we were interested in making the claim in order to explore picture symbols, our principal goal was understanding our practices, not proving some facts beyond doubt to external audiences. Nor did we feel that some kind of ‘measured outcomes’ reflected the outcomes we were looking for. If we believed that good schools were inclusive schools that maximized participation and learning for all students, then individual participation and progress was what we hoped was happening through the use of the symbols. We were not interested in some standardized and measurable outcome for a large group, but in progress for individuals. We hoped that our focus was therefore ‘rigorous’ in the sense we wanted to collect evidence and allow our claims to be modified by evidence, but in terms of individuals and their progress.

As we collected data to explore our claim we also realized that the conversations were evolving. As with the conversations about context, those about the claim allowed us to ‘dig deeper’ into exploring the use of picture symbols but to move away from immediate application to what became more interesting reflections on the nature of teaching and learning. One example of such a conversation is shared below, in which the group reflected on what was different when in the group to when they were teaching in schools:

T4: For J and S, we’ve had a longer history of this shared space, conversation.

M: K, you build more public spaces in your school - that’s the way you do it. You nudge people into it.

T1: What do we do in this group of moving from what you do individually to this group?
T2: For me, through the richness of the conversation and the kind of extensions of thinking that goes on, somebody starts an idea, takes it away, I find that really interesting.

T3: Also, the fact that we can have challenge - that somebody says “I don’t think that’s right.” But in a way that you don’t get upset or angry.

T1: Also, reporting, presentations - that’s going further out as well.
T2: For me, it’s been a very enriching experience because I’ve been secluded. I like to expand my thinking. I like to hear what other people have to say and after the group’s meetings I’ve always been thinking ‘That was great.’ I feel like I’ve extended myself. It’s not about implementing something in my classroom - it’s more about extending my thinking which I think does impact my job but it is professional development. - it’s talking at a higher level than the little art projects that I’m doing. And continuing to challenge me intellectually and I think for me if I’m challenged intellectually - with these three people, how many things I come out learning by the end of the conversations, even if it’s not about education, everybody brings their interests and wealth of knowledge that you combine - and it just extends your thinking.

T4: Having conversations that just flow with mutual respect and no-one’s here to judge anybody. It’s just been a very enriching environment and I think we need more of these things with our profession because we’re in education which is about learning fundamentally and if you don’t continually learn then it’s not education.

In each area of focus - context and claim - we searched for evidence. This led us towards a realization that our practices might evolve through the greater understanding that came through the conversations. Because the conversations included the search for evidence and reflection on such evidence, we also felt more confident that any evolution in practice was based on something more than intuition. This sense of ‘evolving practice’ is somewhat different to ‘changing practice’. Our discussions did not lead any participant to suddenly change an approach or a practice, but we felt they contributed to our understanding and created opportunities for evolution of practice in a less literal way than ‘changing practice’ implies. We discussed Simons (1999) concepts of ‘near’ and ‘far’ transfer, the former reflecting immediate application or change after a professional development experience, the latter reflecting greater professional growth and understanding, with the concept of ‘far’ transfer resonating for us and, we felt, reflecting the type of understanding and application in our group.

T3: I wonder too if there’s different points in your career or your development as an educator where you need more of one or the other. I’ve a hunch there is, that part of doing things for a long time, and doing things in a different way. But I wish I’d done it earlier. I’m not sure, if you’re planning for that as a process.

T2: But if you’re a brand new teacher coming into this kind of group, you don’t even know what you’re doing. So tomorrow’s a place where it becomes more
important to use PD stuff.

T4: It gives you more passion for your job when you have that opportunity - the reflective discussion.

M: Why?

T4: It's energizing. I guess it reminds you why you went down that road in the first place, and so when you're feeling that you just want to go away and start closing your door this brings you back into it. This is the energy behind teaching. You take that back into your work. Going back you are willing to try more conversations because you realize how important it is.

T1: I don't think that's true for everybody. It would be nice if all the educators thought that. But we're here because we're like that but some people just want the lesson for tomorrow even if they've been teaching for a long time. Or they may not even want that - 'I've been doing my lessons for 20 years and I know what I'm doing, right?' And it comes back to personality. It's who you are, even before you're in this system.

A growing realization: Reflections on the group's inquiry approach were becoming a more central focus of our discussions

The research group realized during our conversations that two parallel threads were being developed in our discussions, and could be articulated. In one, the group explored the use of picture symbols to support all students' learning in elementary schools. They tentatively stated their claim and then engaged in extensive data collection and reflection to consider the validity of the claim. In so doing, they included a range of contexts, explored different roles, identified discreet area where picture symbols were used, and considered when collaborations demonstrated success or failure. This journey was documented in a Case Study co-authored by all five participants. The writing involved 18 drafts, each one passing through every team member for drafting and editing. Each draft was accompanied by discussion and debate about approaches, practices and evidence.

The drafting process stimulated discussion, and seemed to expand our thinking about the use of the symbols and our approaches to teaching:

Thinking back through our experience - there were different places. At the start
we were wondering about how to go about what we were going to do - a whole conversation about where we were going, what it was about. There was a lot of time where we were in two schools and watching things happening, thinking it through a bit more, then we started to organize in terms of themes. But one of the key focuses was testing out that claim that Boardmaker helps all kids learn. Whether that was true or not, how to explore it. So we made a claim not to say 'this is right' but to think about it. So we put it down on the table and said, 'Let's have a conversation about whether that's true or not.' But for a long time the focus was on getting the ideas down, the report together. We had about 18 drafts of that report - it kept going back and forth (T4).

This area of conversation was to some extent task-oriented, with the written Case Study being our final product, and conversations enabling us to understand and articulate the descriptions and explorations that would form the report. This process reflected our shift from private to public space both in terms of our conversations and in terms of the completed Case Study which would be accessible publicly on the web. Our early decision to make a claim also meant that this claim would be more publicly exposed through publication, as would our ways of collecting evidence, and the evidence itself. Surprisingly, such public exposure of claims and evidence did not alarm the group. The claim was intended not as definitive but as a guide to our inquiry, and as such it interested and motivated our group to think about the claim. Similarly, through the publication we invited others to think about the claim, and to weigh the evidence. If that happened, and we were challenged, that would provide further opportunity for discourse from which we might learn more, just as we had through the drafts and the discourse accompanying the drafts. Going public, therefore, represented an opportunity not a threat.

The second thread was that the group started to think about what was happening within the group, and about the nature of the conversation which always returned to a central focus on students, and on meeting their learning needs. This was evident when one participant stated: "Almost all of our conversation is about how to support student
learning, and how to meet all students' needs in the classroom. It really is a conversation, not a right or a wrong answer."

They stated that the conversations were changing their view of teaching. One participant stated that, "Encouraging conversations between adults has taken teaching to a different place." But, what was 'a different place'? and, where was the place they were coming from? It appeared to me that we had started a journey to understand more about our practices in schools, and that during this journey we had started to reflect, somewhat unwittingly, on the nature of the journey itself, and whether it offered us more than other journeys we had undertaken. Was our research group a form of professional development, and how was it different to other professional development we might have experienced? Why did we feel so refreshed through our discourse, even after long and difficult days? Why did our written report generate so much more discussion than we had anticipated?

The 'different place' was that public space created by the group but which had evolved and changed as the conversations progressed. We had moved from a level of isolation into a group where our ideas and practices could be explained, extended, and questioned. In itself this was 'a different place'. But the group's focus had evolved and changed. We had started by considering the application of picture symbols and moved to discussions about teaching and learning; from identifying context to understanding its influences and our capacity to control or be controlled by it. We were going deeper into these areas through the conversations, and better understanding that while the application of picture communication symbols still intrigued us, it had led us beyond that space into one where
we examined the nature of learning, for us and for the students in the classrooms where picture symbols were used.

To some extent there were some factors about the group we understood and articulated at this stage of the conversation but which had previously been implicit - long-term association involving three of the team, with a shared history of inquiry and publication. This not only eased the initiation of the new group but formed a bridge for new entrants. The trust built among the three with a long history of collaboration, together with the positive relationships and trust between two of the three and the two teachers not part of the earlier association, helped to ease any concerns for new entrants. Essentially, those new to this group but who knew two participants were saying ‘If you’re OK with this, then I’m in.’ The other factors that we felt helped us start the group were very strong interest in the use of picture symbols, and a common passion about and commitment to teaching. So these factors were explicitly identified and considered, and they provided a foundation on which to build discourse, much as my experience in the earlier BCTF research projects had provided a foundation in terms of methods and approaches. By recognizing some components of this foundation, perhaps other inquiry groups might consider what foundations are necessary for their success. But foundations are just something on which to build, and what was built on our foundation was a series of rich discussions.

For me, these discussions became central to the theme and focus of this study. This inquiry group was focusing on teachers’ own practices in schools yet was starting to discuss the nature of the inquiry experience, and what the inquiry process meant to them.
I started to wonder not just about the processes involved in the inquiry but the conditions that supported our approach. Looking through the extensive data already collected, I started to see patterns of how we extended thinking through our discussions. One person’s comments might be extended by another, often with statements that sometimes reflected empathy, sometimes challenges. I noted that we were able to accept critiques of our thinking from each other in ways that spurred further discussions. Challenges were of interest to the group, and were not seen as threatening. Such challenges often shifted our thinking, or our approach in ways that we enjoyed.

The Case Study documents a form of inquiry that has evolved and become more sophisticated than the four projects which took place between 1992 and 2002. In terms of its contribution to the first phase and research question of this project, it has expanded the understanding of what inquiry can be. Making a claim was one example of the difference with this inquiry to earlier projects, with an exhaustive collection of data to support the inquiry focus. There is ample evidence that the inquiry stimulated participants’ professional learning about their teaching and how they incorporated picture symbols. Such evidence was provided in the filmed classes and discussions.

But it is in the evolution of the inquiry reflected in the Case Study where something very different occurred in this project when compared to earlier ones. This occurred when the focus of the inquiry shifted from a focus on picture symbols to a focus on their learning and professional development through an inquiry approach. The discussions that occurred were rich professional development, and this is what distinguishes this period of inquiry. Yet, much as had been found in 2002, the understanding of inquiry had reached a
benchmark, with a growing knowledge of inquiry processes and utility, some evidence of moving out of isolation and into more public space, and a greater understanding of how conversations extended understanding of practices and roles. We had learned more about the nature of collaboration and the need to take some risks by making claims and extending our thinking through giving and receiving challenges.

So we were now at a junction. The Case Study was completed and posted on the Multiliteracies website, and our work was theoretically over. The experience within the research group produced rich data about practices in schools, and some reflections on the experience of inquiry. Much like the time in 2002, I felt that by the end of the Multiliteracies research I had arrived at another benchmark, with greater understanding of the inquiry process than I had in 2002. The learning over four years included a much greater understanding of context, its influence and the capacity of educators to both use context productively or to change or compensate for it. It included a new approach methodologically - making a claim and searching for evidence, not as justification but as a way to explore our practice. Our Multiliteracies inquiry group had demonstrated multiple examples of leadership distributed within the group. The increased focus on meeting individual needs in inclusive schools, linked to the intent of creating a more inclusive society, seemed to have become more clearly articulated and more clearly linked in our discussions to an understanding within the group that one purpose of schools is to build more inclusive societies. Thus we linked the 'means' of schooling to the 'end' of an inclusive society. We also better understood that our view of a 'good' school was one that was inclusive and accepting of all students but which also strived to make schools places where all students learned, and were not simply housed. There was a
shift from reflecting on practice to reflecting on the experience of teacher inquiry as professional development. We also noticed that evolving conversations were richer and more interesting than starting conversations - that something was happening during these conversations that engaged and excited us.

But we had still not addressed in detail some of the issues that had been generated in our thinking about the group. We had connected our conversations to discussions of good teaching, and to good education, but needed to ‘dig deeper’. We felt as though we had shifted form a somewhat private and isolated space to a more collaborative and public space, yet we did not have much sense of what that really meant, although we sensed that what happened during our conversations was crucial to understanding this more. We had talked to some extent about the nature of our experience and why it was a form of professional development that engaged and stimulated us, yet had not explored this to any depth. And finally, I had always been aware of the district/union context of this study, yet had not thought through whether such support was effective, or where it might lead. It felt like the door of understanding teacher inquiry had been opened and some of the qualities that we felt were at the heart of teacher inquiry were now ready for a further phase of exploration. How could we better understand the experience as supporting our learning and professional development? What happened in conversations that engaged us and shifted our thinking and understanding? What was the nature of the public space that we had developed within the inquiry group, and why was this of value?

These ideas, then, became a part of the thinking that preceded the formal articulation of the project’s two research questions to Focus Groups, and which would inform
discussions around the two questions. The experience of four years as a research group meant that many of these areas had already been explored to some extent, so that the Focus Group data collection that was to follow would build on a rich body of discussion and data. Part of the purpose of this data collection was therefore to return to some of these ideas, and to revisit them. We had opened them up during our inquiry. Some were more thoroughly discussed than others. But in focusing on the two questions below, the group could build on and revisit the journey already traveled and widely discussed, referring back to their inquiry experience and connecting the threads of earlier inquiry to emerging ideas in a new discussion. The two questions posed were:

1. How valuable is teacher inquiry in supporting teachers’ learning and professional development?
2. How does collaborative inquiry move teachers into more public space, and why might that have utility for teachers and for the systems in which they work? Does this connect to notions of good teaching and good education systems?

While posing these questions I was also searching for a sense of the implications for a teacher union, or for any organization interested in considering its support for teacher inquiry, which might be generated from responses.

These questions were posed to the participants in the Multiliteracies Research group, and to a second inquiry group (Teaching to Diversity), and form the basis of the 2006 data collection which is discussed in the next chapter. As stated earlier, the Diversity group was included to consider whether two concurrently-operating but unconnected inquiry group participants may have had similar or different perspectives on teacher inquiry. Reviewing the conversations from occasional videoconferences, and linking the three Diversity inquiry groups led to a tentative understanding that some similarities in
perspectives on inquiry appeared to be developing between the two different and unconnected groups. Both, for example, had spoken of the value they saw in conversations with peers, and about the utility of regular meetings with some facilitation and support. If some similarities appeared to be emerging, then collecting and analyzing data from this second teacher inquiry approach would allow for a consideration of whether these similarities were real and could be identified. Conversely, using the second group enabled identification of differences between the groups, should these be occurring. Just as the four (1992-2002) inquiry projects provided data across inquiry groups, so the addition of the Diversity group at this stage of data collection allowed for more breadth and depth on data collection and analysis.
CHAPTER V  Focus Group Data Collection, 2006

Introduction

During the four years of the Multiliteracies project, the inquiry group had not only explored the use of picture symbols, but had become increasingly reflective about inquiry processes that they had experienced. Some conversations had explored why inquiry was of value and interest to them. Others had considered the nature of conversations and why participants considered these important. The use of extensive conversations while meeting as a group had been identified as moving individuals in the group from private into more public space. This was stated as being a ‘different place’ to the places previously experienced, which were more isolated and less satisfying.

Over the same period that the Multiliteracies group had been meeting, other BCTF inquiry groups in a project called ‘Teaching to Diversity’ had been operating in three school districts. I facilitated both the Multiliteracies group and the ‘Diversity’ groups. I was struck by how much in common was being discussed by participants in both groups. Discussions about the value of inquiry as professional development were common. Participants in both groups often spoke of how excited they were to engage in professional conversation with peers, and how they felt that meeting regularly in groups not only removed their sense of isolation but provided a stimulus to focus on their teaching and the learning of students. While I had not systematically collected data from the Diversity groups over the four years, I decided to include them in Focus Groups in this phase of the data collection. There were two reasons for doing this. The first was because of the similarity of views expressed about inquiry as professional development, and about the value of the more public space of such groups. The second reason was to use the data from the Diversity groups as a form of triangulation. Using the same
questions addressed to both groups was intended to consider similarities or differences in perspective on the inquiry experience.

Thus, the central themes of this research had been identified over the four years of the projects, and were now articulated in the two research questions that would initiate discussion in the two Focus groups that constitute the final phase of data collection in this study. The two questions were:

1. How valuable is teacher inquiry in supporting teachers' learning and professional development?
2. How does collaborative inquiry move teachers into more public space, and why might that have utility for teachers and for the systems in which they work? Does this connect to notions of good teaching and good education systems?

The questions were posed to participants in two Focus Groups, one group involving four people who worked together in the Multiliteracies project, and the second made up of ten teachers who participated in the 'Teaching to Diversity' project.

While the delineation of the questions may appear clear, with one focusing on teacher inquiry as professional development, and the other exploring the shift from private to public space, the responses often tended to include both areas of focus in single responses. As examples, participants stated that they experienced considerable learning while moving from private to public spaces. Their views on inquiry as professional development connected to their views of operating in a more public space. This Chapter outlines their perspectives on the two questions and also includes some consideration of the implications of their comments for school districts and teacher unions. While such comments were not an explicit focus of the empirical data collection, they were clearly
parts of the context which participants believed greatly influenced their professional existence, and so they are considered in this chapter.\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{How useful is collaborative inquiry in supporting teachers' learning and professional development?}

Participants in both inquiry groups considered the time spent in the inquiry group as professional development, and differentiated the experience of inquiry from other professional development activities:

I guess the biggest thing we'd like to say is that this is one of the most positive professional development activities we've been involved in for a very long time (T1, Multiliteracies participant).

I think the value of this form of professional development is that it's not ‘top-down’ (T8, Diversity participant).

Participants articulated their experience in inquiry groups as a form of professional development useful to them, and delineated differences between what they were experiencing in inquiry groups with other and more common forms of professional development that they had also experienced. In their view, inquiry group participation involved more active participation for the individual and a greater degree of ownership and reflection. It fostered teacher autonomy and leadership by teacher choice of content, and through distributing leadership at different stages during the group's existence. It shifted the focus of professional development away from being told how to teach towards wondering how and why one was teaching. The experience of participating in one of these inquiry groups over time was also compared to the ‘one-off’ professional development workshops, where little sustained times for focus and for follow-up

\textsuperscript{11} In the following section, participants are identified by number (‘T1’) and by project (Multiliteracies/Diversity). ‘F’ refers to ‘Facilitator’, myself.
Teacher inquiry is going deep into something and inquiring of ourselves as opposed to being given something, being shown something, being told something. It’s a different form of PD, and I don’t think it’s one that happens that often. But wouldn’t that be lovely - if everyone could have six months leave of absence to go off and talk.

And I feel this is very different than PD where you go to a workshop and you’re taught ‘here’s a strategy, here’s a lesson, there’s a program.’ All of those are great and have a place but I think sometimes I know this from talking with colleagues that you end up going to so many of those workshops and you take the book and you put it down on your desk and you go about your day because you have to get your job done and the time needed to sit and flip through that book and disseminate it, break it down and make it your own, is never really there. And I have a colleague who’s constantly asking for the follow-up to the workshops to implement them and I think that’s a very legitimate request. And I think the opportunity that this group has afforded is different to that because it’s an opportunity to stop and reflect on your own practice (T2, Multiliteracies participant).

The other thing is that this isn’t a person telling someone else how to do things, right. Nobody here’s in that directive or lead role. We all actually facilitate at different times and in different ways but one of the things is there’s not one person who says ‘I am the person who’s going to show you what to do and how to do it.’ Trying to think through what we do individually and collectively - and go deeper into that. The difference with this kind of experience, which I regard as PD, is that you are not recipients but more active in the sense of creating and building some understanding through the conversation, through the report-writing and through all the experiences we’ve had (T1, Multiliteracies participant).

For some teachers who had not previously participated in such a group, the nature of the inquiry was initially unclear. Yet they were still prepared to participate in this form of professional development, based in part on the trust they had in the people inviting them into the process:

For me, the purpose of us coming together - it seems this is very different to other professional development. When you phoned me up (to J/S) I said, ‘OK’. I didn’t know what I was doing. But it’s a very different purpose. It’s not like a Vancouver School Board workshop - this allows you to extend. There’s not necessarily a finality. Yes, there’s to be a final product but that product was out of the creation of whatever we wanted it to be. You (C) facilitated but there wasn’t a clear picture for the end product. It was more about the process and how it evolved (T1, Multiliteracies participant).
Conversation about our group was usually lively and ranging across several ideas, combining humour and reflections on and approaches to conducting our inquiry into Picture Communication Symbols, and our experiences as a group:

T3. Our end goal was not necessarily for our own PD but for a product to share with other people and what we got out of that was our own PD.

F (Facilitator): That’s an interesting question. I am not sure I agree with that. I think there was a strong focus on the product - the report - but part of the initial focus was to say ‘What are you doing to support literacy in new ways and do you want to think about that?’

So the question was more about looking at a particular approach using PCS and asking people to think and talk about it and share thinking about that. So in doing that, once we had you drawn in, we said ‘Aha, now we have to get this report written.’ Bit nasty, really, we’re a bit naughty. In this group if you hadn’t wanted to write the report, I would have written it. But I saw that this group was much richer for us all getting in there and doing the drafting and the shaping because it just made it so much better. I thought in all those drafts you could see the evolution of it. So one of the things that was going on with the drafting was the collective knowledge really came together and it built something as a report which was powerful. So you’ve got a co-operative effort.

Going back to the start of the project we were not saying to you - ‘You have to write the report.’ I was told that was my job but my preference was that we do it together but it was left up to you to decide if we were to do this or not, collectively. So we did in a way negotiate and in a way we all said we want to do it collectively. We’ve all got something to say. Like, perhaps: ‘We’re not letting you tell the bloody story.’

{Laughter}

T1: But having that guide, having you as the navigator –

T3: Yes.

T4: Having the skill set that you do very well, C. And I think that’s also a role that needs to be there. Because I can hear conversations but it doesn’t keep going, not as naturally flowing, to go as deep as you can go, and feel as enriched by it, without someone asking another question, or hearing that navigation role. You summarize and then throw back the question.

T2: I agree.

T3: Absolutely. I agree too. We came in as the people with the knowledge about a
particular thing but you came in as the facilitator and in another set of hands it might have been facilitated very differently. So I think that the whole experience cannot be separated from that (Multiliteracies participants).

This suggests that some parameters (a report as product) and processes (facilitation) were both understood and acceptable to participants. They made the choice to write collectively. But the comments also reflect a capacity to influence directions - the report could be 'whatever we wanted it to be'. So the experience, while perhaps somehow being clear on some parameters and processes, allowed for a collective autonomy. It offered a sense that those involved could decide directions, and that the experience was a journey of exploration and that the itinerary was not pre-determined individually, or externally controlled. But even while progressing on the journey, they found the facilitation useful to help focus and generate the discussion, or to improve the drafting of the report.

Perhaps these factors represent some key difference to the more familiar and more typical district workshops aimed at implementing an approach which appears comparatively defined in terms of parameters, processes and outcomes. There is some evidence here that participants are stating that some structures and parameters may help to frame but should not control inquiry approaches. While a part of the journey might be unknown at the start, that there should be freedom to go different routes as the needs arise, but some facilitation and structure, in their view, should also be included. Participants in the Multiliteracies group spoke of such different routes, and how they contributed to their learning:

We were being productive, even on those nights when we went this way instead of that way. Going that way had a purpose. To go this way the next time. And it was people’s commitment to that and your ability to facilitate that and all of those things had a significant impact on making it a true inquiry and not just something that did not have meaning. I think all of that comes into play over and over again at different levels (T1, Multiliteracies participant).
In both projects, participants spoke of teacher inquiry/Action Research projects fitting in with school district approaches to supporting professional development. The common approach appeared to be one of districts responding to teacher-developed initiatives with a process which included encouragement and accessing district money for release time.

One ‘Diversity’ participant stated:

At the district level, this project has tied in so nicely with what we’ve been doing in the Curriculum and Instruction Department. For the past two years we have put money into teacher inquiry projects, into professional conversations and into learning communities and we’ve been building PD for school teams around those issues. So it’s been a process of practice what you preach. We’ve tried to build the school and district climate that reflective professionals have a better chance of influencing reflective student practices. So when we’re looking at encouraging school staffs - if they put together an Action Research project and put it forward to the district there’s a very good chance they’ll get money to do. Whether it’s research, a book study, inquiry practices or learning communities - we’ve really promoted that and then gone one step further and said not only is this a good idea for PD but we will model it, provide resources and we’ll work together - district and schools - to make those kinds of things happen (T7, Diversity participant).

Teacher inquiry was being increasingly recognized by district staff as an approach which engaged teachers. District staff appeared to overtly recognize that teacher inquiry approach developed different conversations while also linking the professional development back to both teacher and student learning:

This is a core thing, working on establishing partnerships for the benefit of teacher and student learning and I think the people at district folks in PD and Curriculum/Instruction truly want the same things, and I’m hearing the same conversation at the teacher table that I’m hearing at the district table - it’s how we get those two groups together and keep the PD going so that there’s no hidden agenda here - we want teachers to have a better shot at doing their job and we want to incorporate what we’ve learned about what makes a difference for teachers and kids (T4, Diversity participant).

Another person expressed the belief that there existed general support for teachers’ learning through inquiry among district staff, in their union and by school administrators. Yet, she also stressed the importance of communication about the utility of inquiry approaches to those audiences. She seemed to be both stating that one cannot assume that
merits of a given approach will be recognized, and that there was a need to expand the
'public space' of debate to include a focus on teachers' learning through inquiry:

I guess teachers need to know that their district staff, their union and their AO's
all care about their professional learning and they all care about professional
learning because of the impact on students. And ultimately if we can all keep
working on the fact that we have got a situation here where we are actively
participating in meaningful, relevant PD opportunities with the positive outcome
of better learning for our students, and that the partnership balances all those
people is valuing and recognizing the importance of teacher PD - that
communication has to keep going out there - over and over (T1, Diversity
participant).

Yet there are also questions about the nature and utility of teacher inquiry as professional
development. One participant with a district role reflected on this:

One (theme) is about the value of self-directed teacher controlled PD but the
second is some evidence that this is of utility. So there are two views - one saying
we've had this good experience and why, but here's another side - could be
internal to union or district - or across them - the two voices are saying: This has
been a great experience and why but there's something else where we need more
evidence of what it is and I guess I'm trying to think that through (T6, Diversity
participant).

This person was asking for evidence, and how to gather it. While this research is intended
to consider, in part, the nature of evidence concerning the utility of teacher inquiry, such
evidence may not be definitive. One might even argue that it should not be, as some
teacher inquiry may be more useful than others. Thus, it may not be possible to make a
case for the utility of the general concept of teacher inquiry. Yet by the consideration of
specific instances and approaches to inquiry, it should be possible to consider the utility
of the particular approaches. But another use of the question lies in asking the question,
perhaps not once but often. In our Multiliteracies project we occasionally would say 'So
what?' The question meant 'What is the use of this? Does it help students learn? Does it
help us to teach better?' By regularly asking such questions we felt we were checking to
see if our inquiry was linked to real practices in schools. As teacher inquirers, we may
need to keep asking and possibly reframing this question, both within our group and within expanded spaces such as within school districts and within teacher unions. ‘So what?’ can be a quick and useful reminder to reflect and to question if teacher inquiry is useful, whether as professional development, or to support student learning and teacher capacity.

How does collaborative inquiry move teachers from private to public spaces, and why might that have utility for those engaged, and for the systems in which they work?

There were three main ways in which teachers in the inquiry groups moved into more public spaces which all in some way contributed to their learning: through conversation with peers and facilitator; by creating small, safe public spaces as a first step in going more public; and by creating energized spaces. Participants spoke of inquiry Groups moving them and other teachers out of isolation:

The big thing for me is that I think the job is just too overwhelming for people to work in isolation and I think that often in the past our teachers were feeling that’s the way they had to work. So one of the things that’s really struck me as I’m approaching the end of my career in education - I realize more and more how teachers have to help other teachers - that we can’t depend on the universities to do that - it has to be ongoing. Not only does our PD need to be ongoing but we also need to support each other (T3, Diversity participant).

Conversation is a crucial component of moving from private to public space

The importance of conversation to those participating in the two inquiry groups is major. Yet such conversation is neither casual nor haphazard. While it has aspects of being social, and there was frequent laughter, its focus appears intensely professional.

Participants indicated that it progressed through stages, each stage becoming richer and moving away from immediate application of a practice to questions about the nature of teaching and learning. Yet all aspects of conversation in the groups returned to practice, to participants’ work as educators, and to the learning of students.
One Diversity group participant stated ‘As teachers told their stories it was helpful to us all’. This reflects the shift from private space to shared, public space described by participants in both projects, with a group listening to an individual, in some cases ready to respond with empathy, questions or challenges. At the heart of moving from a private to a more public space is the use and nature of conversation in both teacher inquiry projects.

Participants in the both projects stated that meaningful and intellectual conversations were rare in their everyday work, with little chance to engage in the kinds of conversation they had experienced in training. One Multiliteracies participant stated: “Teachers go to university and they train how to become a teacher and that’s one of the few last times you sit down and have a solid intellectual conversation.” Going into teaching, they felt, meant going into a more private world in the sense that they had few opportunities to discuss their work in more public spaces – with other adults. The private world became their work with students, where reflection without peer conversation was individual and isolating.

For the Diversity group, their work environments were described as busy, complex, sometimes difficult. One used the term “treadmill”, evoking a workplace with constant and repetitious effort which was hard to escape. In contrast, the inquiry groups in which the conversations took place provided a different space to the regular workplace. Most participants stressed that the structure of and the time allowed for inquiry group meetings allowed meaningful conversation to occur. Thus, structure and process appeared important, though often invisible or forgotten once the conversations developed. The
pace slowed. There was time to think, to reflect. It became a form of ‘time-out’ but the
time spent in the inquiry group related back to participants’ regular work, to their
practice, and their students:

So there was a framework but a liberty within the discussion each time that we
would follow the needs of the group. That validated their ideas and concerns and
because it was flexible enough they bought into it better. They really participated
fully because they realized that they were guiding the discussion. Their needs
were guiding the discussion so it was meaningful to them at all times (T2,
Diversity participant).

Inquiry group times became places to articulate ideas, describe approaches, to articulate
some form of knowledge and have it tested through conversation with peers.

We had a number of examples where teachers reflected on the kind of
conversations we were having and the kinds of activities we were doing. In
particular, one teacher said this was a really great opportunity to look beyond
what she already knew and test that knowledge against what other people in the
field were thinking. It really gave her that opportunity to say that: Here’s what I
know, what I’ve learned about teaching and now I get to share that and discuss
that in a situation with colleagues who are in a similar field and test that
knowledge out. By being able to do that the whole group was able to talk about
how that might change their practices the next day or the next week. That
opportunity, not just to share ideas but to test the knowledge that they had
acquired through their teacher training or through what they’d done with students
- this was really valuable (T5, Diversity participant).

It was really interesting as we engaged that conversation - I think - I know - they
were looking at situations where they were working at school and feeling safe to
come out and talk about this and say ‘see, this has given me a new insight into
that’ so that they brought questions to the table for other people to respond to (T1,
Diversity participant).

In the previous chapter, I stated that participants in the Multiliteracies project spoke of
the conversation ‘taking teaching to a different space’. That space was explored in more
depth in this phase of data collection. It was described as both a more public space and a
space of greater understanding about practice and the context in which practice took
place. Engaging in the conversation allowed participants to move from their private space
into a welcoming but challenging public space.
In this project, we found that the actual process of writing linked directly to both 
provoking conversations, and influencing the nature of such conversations. Participants’ 
view of the writing process in the Multiliteracies project, with its 18 drafts, was that it 
generated multiple conversations; during which their thinking and understanding were 
extended. One person’s new writing, editing, or challenge, became a spur to thinking 
beyond what had already been expressed, and the spur became a focus for debate. 
Writing for publication reflects another form of moving into a more public space beyond 
the space developed by the group. A report, once written and published, is accessible to 
anyone who chooses to read it:

That report was about going into a different space. But what the product of a 
report does when I think about it is it concretizes the thinking because you write it 
down and as you do that I read it and think ‘Oh, that’s interesting. I hadn’t really 
thought of it like that. And maybe we could add a bit more here about that or we 
could have a conversation about something you’ve written and we’d take it 
further. Or we reorganize it. So that all the 18 drafts were really multiple 
conversations about what Boardmaker (the picture symbols software) was about 
and how we used it and what the context of the school was, on the individual role. 
Writing the report is going more public than our conversation because that report 
is then more accessible to larger numbers of people. And was there something in 
the writing process that was either interesting - or frustrating because the damn 
thing keeps coming back (T2, Multiliteracies participant).

I think too sometimes the longer you write something you involve yourself and 
your thinking shifts. So what you wrote was the truth at the time you wrote it. 
However, it continues to evolve as conversations progress, as you continue to 
think about something it does change because time has passed and conversations 
have occurred so of course there’s going to be an evolution to the paper (T4, 
Multiliteracies participant).

The extension of thinking has at least two dimensions. In one, participants went through 
the process of conversation, listening, building and creating a shared understanding of a 
practice. But a second dimension involves moving beyond a practice (the use of 
Boardmaker picture symbols) to consideration of what the practice reflected in terms of
teaching and learning:

And if you’re bouncing an idea around and if somebody takes it and runs with it further, and then somebody else rides it up, it becomes much more sophisticated in a way. The initial conversation is about a practice, or about a tool, but the real conversation is about the kids’ learning and how all of this fits together into that, how you can improve and develop your teaching and systems to support kids’ learning. And so there are multiple layers. But you only get into the layers through exploration, through the conversation (T2, Multiliteracies participant).

And I’m noticing that we’ve shifted our conversation from our group obsession with Boardmaker into a much bigger conversation and the conversation about Boardmaker is no longer the focus. It’s more about teaching and pedagogy and communication at all levels – the communication needs of children, communicating with other adults including collaborators (T1, Multiliteracies participant).

Yet in some cases, participants also wanted to engage more intellectually, linking their world of work to a more abstract and semiotic intellectual reflection. This was valued because it was rare:

I hold on to the conversation we had one day of what comes first - the concept or the label of the word - the concept of ‘table’ or the word ‘table’ and I go back to that conversation we had in this room all the time and I go back to it in multiple contexts, not just in my job but in other conversations and other contexts. How we perceive things in the world - is that my perception, is that the concept - what is that? This opportunity doesn’t happen that often for educators (T4, Multiliteracies participant).

It became clear that spaces were not static but evolving. Conversations became richer, so that in one case a participant spoke of the shift in conversation being ‘really beautiful’ as she enjoyed delving deeper into reflections on her practice, and moving well beyond a consideration of applying the use of picture symbols. The Multiliteracies group started with the symbols and their application, but gradually felt that a changed conversation was taking place in the ‘different space’ identified by participants. Initially engaged in thinking about application of an approach, the group became engaged in thinking about the nature of teaching and learning, with the initial conversation somewhat downgraded in importance, or at least considered one early and necessary step. We felt that it was not
possible to get to the ‘deeper, more meaningful’ conversation without the initial focus on
the application of picture symbols, but once at the deeper level we were reluctant to
return:

One of our last conversations, I said, ‘So what next?’ and we started hearing that
collection and we all realized it was a very concrete conversation around Boardmaker. But it was not what it ended up being. It ended up being about visual literacy, communication, all those sorts of things that our paradigm of what we came together to talk about shifted to a much deeper, more complex, meaningful conversation than just the superficial conversation about how you make some Boardmaker ‘things’ and put them into classrooms. It shifted to a much deeper, more enriching place in terms of how you think about these things. And so that shift in the conversation was a really beautiful one (T1, Multiliteracies participant).

Yet there were always lighter moments when the group took the chance to laugh:

We’ve touched on the notion that in conversation you extend the ideas. As an individual you might be thinking about something but you can only talk to yourself for so long before you get bored.

{Laughter}

The word ‘conversations’ implies something casual, perhaps unimportant. Yet there exists evidence that these conversations were neither casual nor unimportant to those involved. While structures and processes encouraged informality, they created the conditions for reflection on practice. Once the conditions were created, participants engaged to focus on their teaching and the needs of students. They extended the way that they thought about teaching and learning, and considered the experience intellectual, stating that such intellectualism was not a norm in their daily lives, and that it was both valued in the group, and missed in the daily routine. They challenged and were challenged. They moved out of isolation, and started to create different spaces, both literally and conceptually. The literal new space was the inquiry group, out of school, differently-paced, more respectful of their professionalism and adult learning needs. The new conceptual space was one in which discussions of pragmatic applications evolved
into discussions about the nature of learning and teaching, and from consideration of a software application using visuals to reflection on the nature of visual images in schools and the world.

All of these factors contributed to making participation in conversation an experience that was valued by every participant, and which was seen by them as powerful professional development.

The creation of a safe, smaller spaces in schools, and the inquiry group as a small, safe space appeared consistent across the two groups

One unexpected finding was the continued reference to preferences and a perceived need for smaller spaces in schools. Such spaces were being created by participants both as a way of establishing boundaries and as a way of building some public but safe and contained space in school environments which could at times be difficult and where it was often problematic to collaborate or converse professionally. In the following quote, one teacher described how she had created a small network within a school where the larger community of teachers appeared unwilling to collaborate:

Because there are people - the school environment is not conducive to collaborative work. However, within my school the reason I continue to stay is because the people I work with directly and who I choose to work with. I work extremely well with them. So that’s the reason I continue to stay in that environment because I have created an individual little circle that I feel comfortable with. I choose now not to go into the staffroom. I go to my classroom, go to certain places, talk to certain people, and that’s it. Because I don’t want to get involved in conflict. I’m there to work with the children and to work with the people I need to get the services for the children. I don’t need to be part of the gossip, the never calling, the - septic staff, so although I’m in the basement in my corner I have my little barriers up so I’m not driving into that (T1, Multiliteracies participant).

Participants spoke of ‘going smaller’ in their work focus, withdrawing to some extent from wider collaborations and conversations into areas where they felt both greater safety and where they were more likely to achieve results. One Multiliteracies participant stated
that she was withdrawing into a smaller space as a survival mechanism, saying "So I'm getting really clear this year. I'm going to get smaller because at this point I feel that's how I need to function to survive and do my job well."

The frequent use of the words 'small' or 'little' also seemed to reflect participants' sense that they were very minor cogs in a very large system, and that their work made no impact on the greater system. But they were finding ways to act within systems to meet both their own needs and the needs of students:

I think we need a lot of support. Don't we? We sometimes forgot that, on the system - 'the system' that we like to talk about - can feel not very supportive and how do we then create systems? It sounds like you've (to other participant) created a friend of a support system in your school and I do that - we all find a way of doing that. And it's so important - we need ideas, we need people to help sustain our thinking. And we need to look after ourselves because we spend our days looking after other people and putting out a lot of energy - and they give so much back - but we really have to find ways of keeping alive in our work I guess, and it's really important to find that light, whatever that is, and it feels like we have to find ways of creating that. And maybe that's it. Maybe it isn't that a bigger system can necessarily do that but it needs to have the flexibility in it where there's possibility for that. And it can be created in ways that people need it to be created (T3, Multiliteracies participant).

This discussion reflects one person's need for inspiration in her work ('keeping alive', finding 'the light'). She also reflects on the need for moving into more public space but also to have such spaces be safe, supportive, with boundaries and with some level of control by participants. If some spaces in which the teachers worked were not supportive, then they created spaces that appeared to compensate for the less supportive ones. This speaks to the active engagement of these teachers in finding and creating more public spaces which met their needs, rejecting passive acceptance of unsupportive spaces and developing alternatives. They shaped their context and were not controlled by it. They decided to create systems they could influence and shape rather than dwell on limited
systemic support or their ability to influence bigger systems. Yet they were choosing networks and systems with care, and rejecting working in a collaborative way with those who were hostile or uncooperative.

Both inquiry groups established a safe space by focusing on needs - often uncertainties and even fears - within an established process in which other group members listened with some empathy to each other’s stories, as was evident in the following conversation in the Diversity project:

T5: One thing M mentioned an idea of safety within group. Was the group a place where people were ‘coming out’ in a sense - out of shells or isolation?

T3: I think that was a really important aspect of our meetings. This year a lot of people in our group were novice to the job of school support and we have ongoing meetings through the year where people are given information and an opportunity to ask questions and learn. But a lot of people in our group were not prepared to ask questions in a big group and they found they could ask much more meaningful questions for themselves and get a deeper answer in a small group setting. It just really personalized it and it was very much about - discussions were very much about the needs of the group at the time and it was always evolving and we were able to go back and revisit topics from previous meetings because there was consistency within the group.

I think it really does nurture the opportunity for people to be safe and get down to the nitty-gritty things that really bother them. If they need to ask the same question at the next meeting then they do. Or if they need to get back more information on it than they feel comfortable doing that. There was so much sense of agreement - yeah, I find the same thing - so much shared experience - that I think it was really encouraging people to open up even more and I don’t think in a school - in some schools you might have 1 or 2 people doing the job of school support - so for certain isolated kind of jobs it is even more helpful for them to have an opportunity to meet with alike people with alike experience and it was very beneficial, particularly for the people that were new and they really took advantage of it (Diversity participants).

The ‘safe’ space of the inquiry groups was respectful, empathic and challenging. They allowed participants to feel sufficiently comfortable to listen, and to speak, in ways that appeared different to what they experienced in schools where time and the pressures of
work allowed for little space of any kind. But more than just generating a sense of ‘safe space,’ the inquiry groups generated energy among participants, which is considered below.

**Both groups became energizing public spaces**

Moving from a private to a public space was not just about location, or about having other people to talk to. The shift was qualitatively different for participants, and was seen as exciting and energizing. They considered that they experienced opportunities to ‘grow’, both professionally and personally by taking part in an inquiry group that stimulated them:

> But we’ve taken time out of our day because we actually want to be here and I feel stimulated too. Just to continue to grow – and enriched as a person, not even just professionally. But I enjoy talking about my profession. I feel it’s the right job for me. It validates that I’m in the right field (T2, Multiliteracies participant).

Individuals entered a space in which they collectively created both safety and challenge, which in turn energized them within the time the meetings took place, and which renewed their energy for and commitment to teaching. It also offered some encouragement not to return to isolation and private spaces:

> So it was profoundly exciting and we all talked about how tired we were when we would come at the end of the day (at school) and often the session - 3:30 to 6:30 - our energy level had been raised, so it was a very supportive environment. We felt safe in engaging provocative thoughts that really challenged some of our core beliefs and yet we came away energized and committed to following through on different initiatives that we’d agreed to (Diversity participant).

> When I look at teachers next year and how fast our teacher participation has grown in this - it’s not just that it’s a great program - it’s because people leave feeling - it’s a great structure - they leave feeling further ahead at the end of every meeting than when they get there and that’s a lot with everything that’s going on or that’s what impresses me. They feel a sense of moving forward in all the complex dailyness of what they do (T4, Diversity participant).
Words such as ‘gift’ and luxury’ were repeatedly used to describe the time for group meetings in which the inquiry occurred, implying the experience was of a qualitatively different nature to their regular time as educators:

To just have the luxury of sitting and reflecting on our own practices and being able to dialogue on each others’ practices - I think is a huge gift. And for those new novice teachers to be felt like they’re being treated as professionals and for them to have the luxury of being fed and meeting outside the school - I think we can’t stress that enough - that they really feel that once they are given that entitlement - that all of a sudden it raises them to a realm of being like the businessman being out on the lunch - it’s like what I do is really valued and ‘people really want to hear what I have to say about it in this very professional atmosphere’ (T2, Diversity participant).

The whole release time - we have time in lieu in Nanaimo - and I’m hopeful that will continue it for the job of school support. There’s sometimes easier times to get a sub than others, or to be away from the school than other times, so to have the flexibility of taking the time when convenient to you has been a huge gift for a lot of people, and a lot have said that it’s been one of the best parts, the best spin-offs of this whole experience in addition to the things they’ve taken away from each meeting as well. A lot of parts have been very positive (T7, Diversity participant).

These comments also reflect the participants’ sense of the isolated and rare nature of such ‘gifts’ for teachers. Apparently simple acts, such as the provision of food, flexible time allocations decided on by one group, getting away from schools, all linked to a professionally-focused activity, do not appear to be a norm for these teachers. This suggests that the conditions which are available to most adult professionals when they attend professional meetings are not being provided for at least some teachers in education systems. In fact, even minimal conditions of respect for individual teachers as professionals are being viewed as rare, and as a luxury.

A second level at which groups were energized involved moving beyond the individual group to discussions with other groups. For the Diversity group, this was achieved through meeting in Vancouver and through videoconferencing where the union’s
facilities were used to engage facilitators in the three school districts in discussions about their progress and learning. The same energizing that occurred within the individual groups was described by those who participated in the Vancouver meetings and in videoconferences:

...definitely a learning experience - always and it continues to be. And each time we’ve gone to Vancouver and had discussions at that level it was a new learning time as well. So overall I continue to marvel at it and hope to continue learning in this process (T6, Diversity participant).

I love hearing these discussions with this group because it’s so nice to hear what’s happening elsewhere and what other people are thinking (T4, Diversity participant).

The Nanaimo Diversity group held annual presentations of their inquiry. For this, a formal invitation card was sent to trustees, senior district staff, and to local College educators. School administrators and teachers were invited through district and union communication systems. Guests were welcomed with a wine and cheese reception, and viewed posters placed on walls around a hotel meeting room. Inquiry group participants offered short (20 minute) presentations of each inquiry group’s approach, experience, and findings. This was followed in one session by a panel, including the BCTF President, a trustee, and a school Principal, offering their reactions, followed by a general discussion and debate. In some ways, this was both a public relations exercise and an opportunity for participants to articulate their work and be open to scrutiny and challenge.

For the Multiliteracies group, most have yet to expand their discussions beyond the group. However, one of the group was invited to present on the group’s work at a Prince George professional development day. This day was organized by one of the ‘Diversity’ group members with an interest in Boardmaker picture communication symbols, and costs were supported by the BCTF. I co-presented and used the visit for other meetings in
support of the ‘Diversity’ group. In reflecting on this presentation, the Multiliteracies participant realized that going beyond the group had benefits, for herself and for those participating in the workshop we delivered:

When you and I went to Prince George, and I thought – all this stuff I brought, it’s all just stuff that I’d made. But I’m sitting back and watching these people’s responses to it and I’m thinking, ‘Oh! So it’s not just ‘stuff.’ It’s not just ‘here - take that’ - it had a bigger, more significant value than that. And I think that for me was a huge thing to see, that I’d done things that had more value for other people beyond my own little set of circumstances. I think that’s also important because it makes you realize you have multiple things to offer as an educator, not just what you’re doing directly with children (T1, Multiliteracies participant).

The Multiliteracies group has ‘gone public’ through the publication of their Case Study on the Multiliteracies web site. This report reflects their central claim and their exploration of this claim, as well as the contexts and collaborations influencing their work and approaches. Each ‘Diversity’ group has published one or more reports on the BCTF ‘Teaching to Diversity’ web page.

**How does the collaborative teacher inquiry experience connect to notions of good teaching and good schools?**

For participants in both the Multiliteracies and Diversity projects, views of what constituted good schools were very similar. Good schools, in their view, were linked to student learning and success, but they defined success in terms of individual student capacity, so that being a good student was about realizing individual potential, not to achievement defined by grades. They also identified being ‘successful in life’ as being a focus of what the ends of a good education system might be:

I had that conversation with a colleague who would say that you have to get grades to go to university, and that’s what being a good student is. I think to myself - No, that’s not what being a good student is. Being a good student is being the best you could be, whatever that is, and I don’t care how you define that. Marks are not necessarily the hallmark of someone who will be successful in life. So I was always bothered by that - a limited definition for success.... I think good teaching and good learning in each individual student actually being the best at their level of what they can be and that doesn’t have to be designed by one set of criteria. So many times you meet people for whom school is not – the right
definition because for so many it's defined by marks. I meet adults who want to go back to school but they're afraid because they can't get good grades. They think that's about being a good learner is about, and it's not (T4, Multiliteracies participant).

All the participants were empathic to the philosophy of Inclusion. Their work was centered on the goal of making Inclusion work, yet they did not focus just on the needs of exceptional students, and their approaches to teaching and what they considered good teaching, were inclusive but considered appropriate to meet all students' needs:

For me, Special Education is simply good teaching. It is not separate and different from classroom teaching. It’s about looking at every one of those kids and saying OK, what is it that that child needs? The classroom teacher will say “They need this, this and this” and I may add to that and develop a plan but it doesn’t have to be nor should it be two separate ways of seeing children, teaching, and teaching and learning. There should be one way and from me it reaches around individual children as opposed to a group and I would say that’s mostly true for most classroom teachers (T1, Multiliteracies participant).

One participant argued that every classroom is diverse with a wide range of needs, and that in her view good teaching was about recognizing this diversity not as something unusual but as a norm. Within this norm, she stressed the need for an 'engaging young people in their own learning':

Really it’s about teaching to the diverse needs of students, recognizing that we don’t have (and never had) a stereotyped classroom with all students having the same needs - that there’s an enormous range of needs, emotional and cognitive, within the classroom and it is about engaging young people in their own learning and reflections and presenting and active participation in their own learning (T3, Multiliteracies participant).

Inclusion for these educators was therefore not concerned with focusing purely on marginalized students and including them. It was more concerned with making sure that every student in a class was achieving to his or her potential. This also connects to a view that the purpose of an education system is to meet all students’ needs, and not to measure individual progress with a standard set of outcomes.
Central to good teaching, in their view, were the ‘skill sets’ of teachers, so that they were thinking about teacher skill sets and student capacities within a changing world context:

The whole concept of what our students need to be successful really depends on what teachers can bring to the equation as much as the background experience and knowledge that the students have when they show up at school. So one thing we’ve been looking at is to help teachers with differentiated learning and how to start with the end in mind. So what are the intended outcomes we want? What do students need to be successful today and is that the same as what it’s been before, which we could argue it’s not. And what’s the skill set that a teacher must bring to that equation? What we’re looking at is a world where we can’t be teaching now in the way we were taught if we want the students of today to be successful and it brings in to light the fact that we’ve got that whole issue of teacher skills and student expectations or needs that we have to put together in an environment that makes it manageable for the teachers but also makes it productive for students (T2, Multiliteracies participant).

Conversations about good teaching were extensive, and ranged over multiple areas, but always returned to the need to be able to work collaboratively with other educators:

F: So part of this is about what your role is in the system and how you can support/encourage good teaching?

T2: You do need to consider the combination of teacher skills and surrounding factors. Without the appropriate conditions teachers who are good teachers just end up butting their head against the system if they don’t have support but they know what to do. Then you have the other scenario where you have people who can teach the content of the curriculum but they’re not necessarily teaching to the children all of the time. And what is that? I’ve been thinking about that a lot and I think a lot of it is personality-dependent, about who that teacher is and what they bring with them when they walk into that classroom door and it’s not about the skill set about who they are as a person and how do you affect that change (in a teacher - to teach the child) as a support person it’s like taking on the impossible. So teachers’ own personal style will really affect whether a grey area kid\textsuperscript{12} has as much success as s/he can in that classroom environment versus failure in that classroom if that teacher does not take it on, doesn’t see it as being their job.

T3: I’m thinking about valuing people’s skills - rather than the union policy of a teacher is a teacher is a teacher, but also looking at what an individual (teacher) can bring. I believe that’s one thing that affects why there are so many challenges because you’re not allowing people with similar values and philosophies to work together because of seniority, classification, whatever. If you facilitate people

\textsuperscript{12} ‘Grey area’ is a term commonly used in BC schools to describe students who need some additional level of support but who are not designated as students with special needs,
who work well together - and different people work well together in different ways - but if you’re forcing personalities to clash together just because they’re in proximity rather than facilitating people to find their space. I have colleagues I work fantastic with and the things we do - I just think we do a great job. Other people - we don’t communicate much because we have different philosophies and if you were to force us to work together it would not work at all. I think by allowing more of a flow for people to find where the fit is - that would help a lot. Even within this group we continue to make an effort to get together because we bring our own uniqueness and we have a similar common understanding but if you threw somebody else into the picture, or forced them to be here - it would be a very different interaction and dynamic.

T2: Experience of collaborative inquiry and link - good teaching, what D’s talking about is really basic - that the collaborative process is personality-dependent. How do you get to that? You can shift people who are willing to be shifted. You can find common ground with just about anyone. If you have that ability to communicate and find common ground. But so much of what good teaching is is actually about interpersonal skills and communication with the adults.

F: Especially in your three roles - maybe yours too, D, because your roles are intrinsically and inevitably collaborative or involving communication with adults.

T1: But you can choose not to communicate. You need on some level to communicate but you can really minimize that.

T2: So you can stay in your own class, not bother to talk to anyone else –

T1: Yes, yes.

F: And are there times when you do that?

T1: Absolutely (laughs) I do.

T2: Sure.

They also identified a range of contexts within which good teaching needed to be considered, including a changing world, and conditions which might support good teaching and learning. Their notion of a changing world included both issues of globalization and technology:

There’s a shift in our culture - a global lens - we have to prepare young people to be citizens of the world - always an ideal but now it’s in our face and up-front and centre. If we don’t make the process of learning and the access to information relevant and meaningful for those young people we are not going to engage them so I think I agree there’s an urgency for teachers to look at the ways they engage
young people both in the classroom and by other means (T5, Diversity participant).

They also linked their discussion of the ‘global society’ to engagement in learning and the inquiry experience, whether experienced by students or teachers:

If we are supporting young people to take part in this global society, they have to be engaged, they have to be involved, things must have meaning for them from a very early stage. That’s what the art of inquiry is about - being teachers - being reminded of that experience and how powerful it is for them as learners and hopefully that translates into the classrooms that they are responsible for (T3, Diversity participant).

One teacher believed that the inquiry process in which she was involved mirrored what she believed to be good learning. She discussed her learning through inquiry with students whom she was encouraging to adopt inquiry thinking and approaches:

So I share with them (students) that I’m going to work with my colleagues, some new teachers, and that we’ll all work together to help us be better teachers, and the kids all really got that and they get quite excited about the fact that I was going off to work with other teachers and modeling that learning process to them (T2, Diversity participant).

Participants spoke of the need to consider and foster relationships with students in their teaching. They reflected on the nature of the relationship when dealing with a child who was experiencing some difficulty in learning. Interestingly, they did not provide any clear idea of just what the relationship might be, just a sense that building relationships with students, especially those students with learning difficulties, was a factor to consider in their teaching. Such consideration was framed as a question, suggesting on-going reflection and no certainty in terms of the exact components of building relationship:

If you have a dilemma with a child and the issue is that the child may not be learning as effectively as possible, and you’re taking some time to work out what that is - during that time the relationships are ongoing - good or not so good. But there’s a dynamic there, isn’t there? There’s an issue - the problem of the child’s learning, the time that you take to look at what that is, and during that time there are these relationships. What does that mix look like? (T3, Multiliteracies participant).
Relationships with other educators was a major factor in influencing whether they felt that they could provide good teaching because they felt that their work, to be successful in meeting students’ needs, had to be collaborative with other educators. In part, this was because three of the four Multiliteracies participants’ jobs were essentially collaborative, working with classroom and/or resource teachers:

And the more you have conversations with people about their needs, the communication is clearer. I’m always, when working with kids in formal or informal settings, I’m chatting up the teacher. I’m saying ‘Oh, this is what I noticed today’ or ‘I’ve been thinking about this – what do you think?’ I’m doing that all the time because I need their feedback and I also don’t want any surprises. I don’t want to come out with something that is totally going to feel – not that person’s understanding of the child. I really want to get a beat on that person and I want to share that experience – and the more I can do that – it seems that it’s a better experience for everyone. But I really seek that out. And in some situations I really don’t (T4, Multiliteracies participant).

The centrality of conversation and relationship to the work of both Speech-Language Pathologists and Resource teacher was repeatedly discussed. Conversation facilitated collaboration which enabled educators to understand a child’s needs and ‘where that child was at’ in the classroom and in his or her progress through the education system.

Conversation also was central to developing relationships with other educators, with the progress of conversation analyzed as part of a process of deciding whether or not some form of collaboration was possible, and what levels of formality were going to occur.

They preferred the conversation to be less formal and structured. If it was, they felt that students benefited most because it informed discussions between educators:

For me it’s about the conversation - it’s the same thing that J’s saying, and depending on where that child is, in the system, in the big system, in this whole system and in the classroom, those relationships can affect how you start to do what you do. When you’re thinking about relationships or collaboration in that school that has that openness, you can go in a way that’s much less formal, much less systemically structured and just start doing what we’re doing here, just see what you think, and that’s part of that assessment, everybody has input to the information and your classroom is part of an assessment and have everybody understanding that (T3, Multiliteracies participant).
Some form of dialogue and communication with other educators was seen as necessary to best serve exceptional learners' needs. In some situations, responses enabled the relationship to build. In others, it stopped abruptly, limiting the capacity to serve the students' needs. Data illustrated that participants were aware of the need for dialogue, sought it out, but also terminated it when responses were negative or unhelpful. For these educators, good teaching involved building relationships with students and other educators, being aware of dynamics, and, in some cases, avoiding a relationship with educators because they were too difficult to establish or maintain, as illustrated above and in the following dialogue about a situation when the classroom teacher and the Speech-Language Pathologist are viewing a student's learning from different perspectives, with different views on what should be done:

T1: And those are difficult places. And I notice the difference. I feel more anxious about the whole scenario.

F: So when do you not seek to have that conversation?

T1: Well when it feels like we're realizing for whatever reason at cross purposes, when maybe there isn't a shared understanding of the child's problem or there's a different understanding.

F: But isn't that the time when you do need the conversation?

T1: Well you do, but it's difficult sometimes when there may be other behind-the-scenes conversations going on. That's what's going on in those places - you try to figure it out - and people have different agendas - it's very interesting (Multiliteracies participants).

In some cases, there was also fear and apprehension about such conversations - that the classroom teacher was being watched and critiqued, creating a vulnerability that impeded the development of the relationship between classroom and resource teacher:

One thing that happens, as a classroom teacher, if somebody goes into your classroom, it could be very easy to believe that somebody's here to criticize you. Why are you not able to meet the needs of this child? What is the problem with you as a teacher? Versus let's work together to find out how you can learn as a
teacher, a specialist, and work together to meet the needs of this child. But I think as a classroom teacher it’s very easy to feel that someone comes in your room and they’re looking at you and asking you the questions about what you’re saying, doing - it becomes about the teacher rather than about the child. I think - whether because of people’s insecurities or not understanding what the other person’s role is - can put people on the defensive even not really realizing that and barriers come up and conversations are difficult to have and how do you notice it so people can feel that people can come into their room and not feel like they’re being watched? (T1, Multiliteracies participant).

Just as the need for relationship was evident in defining good teaching, so it appeared prominent within the Diversity inquiry group to support participants’ engagement and learning. Relationship was being built in part by the provision of a safe space within the group, such safety being supported by conditions of confidentiality. This building of relationship, and the creation of a safe space links to the notion of expanding one form of private space by making the group a protected space, more public than individual, but still protected from a larger public space:

I’d have to agree with that starting with the needs of participants was so important and in fact that was one of the pieces where we started building the relationship activities in the first session, that there was confidentiality and they could be assured that whatever they brought up and discussed wasn’t going to be shared outside of the group. Building that whole comfort level with them and having the confidence that they knew that every time they came there was going to be something that they wanted to know about addressed - that really increased their desire to be together and to be ready for the next time because they couldn’t wait for the discussion and how it would carry on knowing they could bring up anything they wanted to and that it would be discussed in a serious way (T3, Diversity participant).

One part of building relationships within an Inquiry group was the fact that participants felt valued:

I feel valued for one thing, as an educator and as a person. I feel validated in terms of ... that I have something to bring, that people want to hear. I feel inspired to go and continue to do my job. And enjoyment - I do enjoy coming - if I didn’t I couldn’t be here. I worked really hard to get day care today. Let me tell ya! (T2, Multiliteracies participant).
It appeared that whether in a school working with both students and adults, or an inquiry group with peers, participants felt they could not develop good learning without building relationships. Yet where actual or potential relationships became too tense, they were abandoned.

It was also clear that at least some of the inquiry teams were not randomly selected - both were to some extent built on existing relationships between educators, and between myself and some of the people in the groups:

> Something has been part of this project from the start - we know good people and where they are and we go and get them involved......We try and be democratic in one way but in another way we’re saying ‘we want this to work and if it’s going to work we’ll damn well find the people who’ll make it work’ (F, Multiliteracies participant).

This comment reflected a desire to collaborate but a need to make it work by building on existing relationships. In some way, I believe that building on such relationships is similar to building on knowledge gained through experience of participating in and supporting inquiry groups over time. While my inquiry projects always involve new members, I find that they now frequently include some educators I have known and trusted over time, providing not only some continuity but creating a platform of existing relationships that can offer some foundation on which to build other relationships and new inquiry projects. If I, as ‘A’, know and trust ‘B’ and ‘C’, who in turn know ‘D’ and ‘E’, them all five have some basic and positive relationship established within the group. Perhaps there is something here about building inquiry on what relationships we already rather than always rebuilding the foundations of both relationship and inquiry at the same time. Perhaps we are also implying that we cannot build good schools by always starting
from scratch in terms of relationships, but that existing and good relationships between educators might be one foundation on which a good school might be developed.

**Implications for the role of the teachers’ union and school districts in support of teacher inquiry**

Systematic data collection concerning union and district support was not a feature of this research. Nevertheless, there was considerable discussion of both union and district roles in both Focus Groups, and union sponsorship and support for teacher inquiry has been a common thread in all the inquiry projects considered in this study. Focus Group participants’ discussion on the role of the teacher union is described here. The implications of this research for teacher unions and for other organizations considering support for teacher inquiry is explored in more detail in the ‘Discussion’ section. Both teacher unions and school districts were dominant presences in the lives of teachers, but not always in terms of professional focus and support.

As stated, the union role was not a major focus for data collection within the Multiliteracies group. Yet in reviewing the coding of the transcribed data, I found considerable discussion about the union permeating the conversation that took place. This suggests that while participants may not have strong views on what the union should or should not do in terms of teacher inquiry, they saw the union as an influence on the context of their work. To some extent, they saw their school district and union as two omnipresent and influential entities, yet in some cases had never considered the BCTF as participating in teachers’ professional development. One participant in the Multiliteracies project evoked laughter from the group when she said: “I didn’t even know that BCTF had a room like this where you could talk about things.” This apparently innocuous comment reflects more than its literal meaning, indicating that for at least one teacher the
BCTF and professional conversation were not connected. The ‘room’ is not just the facility but her perception of the union’s support for teacher inquiry. Others connected the union link more to my involvement than to any systemic effort by the union to involve teachers in inquiry:

I didn’t actually know about this stuff until I got invited into something – then I met this C person – it sort of unfolded. Then I thought ‘Oh, this is a really – then I decided that C was a really good contact, right, for moving ideas, like this was a place where there was some way of doing – of bringing ideas (T4, Multiliteracies participant).

I am, of course, C. But while there exists some ambiguity in this statement, my interpretation is that ‘this was a place’ means that ideas could move because I was there and could offer the responses, support, and facilitation needed for an inquiry process. My work is funded by the union, and the union is a partner in both the Multiliteracies and Diversity projects. We do indeed have ‘room to talk about things’, both literally and metaphorically. Yet one participant did not associate the union as buying in to supporting teacher inquiry. She knew that I had ‘bought in,’ but the fact that I was employed by the BCTF and that they were sitting in a BCTF office was not enough to generate credibility that the union was ‘in’. This will be considered in greater detail in the ‘Discussion’ section.

One participant in the Diversity project was active within the union and keenly aware of the multiple areas of focus within the union. Her comments about the value of the inquiry experience as a union-initiated PD activity were unequivocal and positive. Yet she also felt the need to communicate information about the inquiry experience within the union. This appears to reflect a sense that such activities are not necessarily automatically understood or valued. She referred to ‘tensions’ and ‘balance’ within the BCTF and about
its roles and focus in terms of the balance between professional development and bargaining. Communication about the inquiry experience was therefore intended to consider the union’s role in supporting teachers’ professional development:

One of the key things is communication by the BCTF about PD. As a PSA President when I’m sitting in PSAC with other PSA presidents and we’re trying to communicate to the BCTF Executive Committee, the importance of our role in PD activities for teachers, and how you balance that with the political side of the BCTF which has to be there as well. I guess the biggest thing we’d like to say is that this is one of the most positive PD activities we’ve been involved in for a very long time and it’s been very exacting to be able to talk to other groups of teachers and say and look at the possibilities - if you’re thinking about the BCTF as a PD organization, as well as the other role they have, that tension and need to balance within the BCTF building itself is continually being expressed by the teachers who are sitting at the table. So that communication about the good things we do related to PD is absolutely crucial (T1, Diversity participant).

The BCTF has a central office but also has local teacher associations in every school district. In the ‘Diversity’ project, each local teacher association played a role in the inquiry projects through its PD Chair. In the Multiliteracies project, local teacher association roles were less active, restricted largely to initial meetings for information about the project. Yet in both projects there was a sense of the local teacher association acting in some cases in a ‘gatekeeper’ role. In order to proceed, both participating teachers and BCTF staff felt that they needed to inform and gain approval from the local. In some cases the local controlled PD funds, and supported proposed teacher inquiry projects that were submitted:

The Boardmaker project that we did last year was so wonderful because that was fully funded by the local association and as you know one of the difficulties in our district was working out how to access PD money (T6, Diversity participant).

This simple statement perhaps epitomizes both the promise and the perils of local union PD support. One local did support a proposed inquiry project, yet initially teachers were unaware of how to access funds for PD from their local. In exploring processes, the union ‘gatekeeper’ role became very clear. There was a process, forms to be submitted, and a
sense that approval was far from automatic. All of which may be reasonable in a system with limited supply and considerable demand for funds. Yet it seemed that participants in at least one local did not feel a great sense either of interest or welcome from their union after their early attempts to understand how to access PD funds. This caution was not restricted to the local union, but was matched by initial caution in the same district when approached by the union. In both cases, there has been a very clear and evident shift towards greater trust and encouragement from both local and district. One Diversity participant commented that “the teacher inquiry projects that are coming out of schools right now are phenomenal and I think that sharing between district and the local has really promoted that.” This reflects a change, where union and district initially reflected caution, projected suspicion, yet have since become increasingly supportive of the teacher inquiry approaches we have undertaken.

Other local teacher associations played significant roles in supporting the inquiry projects, yet a clear understanding of the local teacher association role remains elusive. In some cases, participants spoke of easy processes where the local union facilitated their participation in inquiry, yet in other cases participants felt their local had no interest in professional issues, and wanted only to focus on the industrial:

I’ve never felt a professional interest from the local union. For me it’s all about issues - what you call the industrial - and I think they may be so overwhelmed with that...though that may vary across the province in terms of what unions are able to do, or their leaders may have a different perspective. But I’ve never found it to be a professional support (T1, Multiliteracies participant).

The role of the local teacher associations’ approach to professional development needs more focus than has been possible in this study. The data lead to a number of questions
about the balancing of focus, the role of the PD Chair, and whether the local is a 'gatekeeper' or might be an active participant in inquiry approaches.

In contrast, there were more discussions about the actual or potential role of the BCTF’s central office operations. Participants considered the central union’s role in advocacy. While they supported such a union role, they articulated a need for the union to involve them in union conversations that might inform such advocacy, to act as a ‘bridge’, connecting teachers across the province. It could be argued that at least one teacher was arguing that a more authentic voice of teachers should be heard and presented to community through the union:

A lot of times the school district is defining the issues for the district and the population. I think traditionally people have seen the union as an advocate for the teachers but also the union has taken on being an advocate for the children saying/talking about special needs, class size issues. You see reports about learning needs and what the union’s wanting to do is support the children, support the teachers, by sharing another view of the information on those sorts of things. If teachers were empowered to be a part of union conversations, on those issues that impact our professional development, our day-day job, if teachers were invited into those conversations more, then they might feel they were more empowered in the voice that is being presented to the public at lots of different levels, not just on a median level, but to involve teachers in a bigger, broader sense across the country. But it’s not within a school district mandate to do that. It’s not their function, not their job. To feel like you’ve connected to a world of teachers, I think is the bridge that the union can provide and it doesn’t always have to be in the context of being in an adversarial role but it could be in building community. So I think if there was more of this that would be good (T4, Multiliteracies participant).

One key advantage that they saw for the BCTF was its provincial rather than local focus, enabling participants in both projects to connect and network across BC, rather than just in their own district:

And you would then know how to connect to other people in other districts who are doing similar things, to other provinces who are doing similar things because – absolutely – I think that would be a critical way of the union supporting its membership (T3, Diversity participant).
These comments collectively suggest that there are implications for teacher unions, school districts and universities that may wish to consider their actual or potential involvement in supporting teacher inquiry. However, it is important to state that any analysis of implications for a teacher union or a school district considering supporting teacher inquiry should not be limited to those areas of data where union or district is discussed. Teacher unions and school districts might consider all the data and analyses in this research. They might consider inquiry groups as professional development, the discussion on adult learning needs, the purposes of schooling or the possibility of cross-organizational collaborations. By better understanding the concepts and contexts of inquiry, unions can better judge the merits of supporting this approach to professional development, and find funds and staffing to support inquiry groups meeting, facilitation, dissemination, networking and external collaborations. These implications will be addressed in more depth in the ‘Discussions’ chapter, below.
CHAPTER VI  Discussion

This study has explored concepts and contexts of collaborative teacher inquiry as professional development in order to consider three questions:

- What is the nature of collaborative teacher inquiry that has engaged teachers in BCTF Research projects?
- How valuable is teacher inquiry in supporting teachers' learning and professional development?
- How does collaborative inquiry move teachers into a more public space, and why might that have value for those engaged and for the systems in which they work?

It has included data and reflections on teacher inquiry projects in which I have participated over a fourteen-year period while working as a researcher in the BC Teachers' Federation. The study has included an exploration of a range of literature which impact or illuminate concepts and contexts of collaborative teacher inquiry. This discussion will address both concepts and contexts, considering what has been learned from this study in order to consider future directions for teacher inquiry as professional development, and for organizations such as teacher unions or school districts interested in supporting teacher inquiry.

In considering the triangulation of data from the three data collection sources, there appears to be very similar findings in terms of processes and approaches to teacher inquiry. Groups have been of a particular size, although the duration of groups became much longer with the Multiliteracies and Diversity projects. Participants spoke in favour of this kind of professional development in all the groups which formed part of this study, welcoming meetings over time, and the space for discourse with peers. There has been some consistency in terms of reporting and presenting of findings. Yet there is also a very clear sense of evolution, in that each project and period of teacher inquiry built upon what
went before, in terms of collaboration, facilitation, support, and reporting. In terms of understanding the nature of conversation, or the influence of context, the levels of understanding now are far different and much improved in 2006 compared to 1992. In the earlier projects, conversation with peers was important to inquiry group members, but there was not a clearly articulated sense of why that should be the case. By 2006, it has become clear how conversation extends, connects, allows for challenges and gradually builds understanding of practices.

The collaborative inquiry approaches documented and used as data sources in this study have evolved significantly. During the 14 years of data collection, two ‘Benchmark’ dates were established – 2002 and 2006 – where the learning from periods of inquiry were summarized and defined. Each Benchmark reflected an improving capacity to conduct and support inquiry approaches, incorporating new methods and understanding over time. Yet all the projects conducted and described in this study between 1992 and 2006 built on a common foundation – the combination of practising teachers with the researcher (myself) acting in both facilitative and coordinating roles. They all involved groups of teachers, and were all collaborative, with a strong focus on conversation and reflection on practice. Collaboration with external organizations such as school districts and universities has become more prominent in recent years. The work of inquiry groups all involved some form of reporting, with an increased focus on web-based publications and a shift away from hard copy.

No single or uniform approach has occurred, and the more recent inquiry projects in this study connect more with Kincheloe’s (2003) and Elliott’s (2005) ideas that there are
‘principles of procedure’ that ‘make sense’ of data collected than with approaches outlining explicit methods of inquiry. Nevertheless, some general structures and processes appear norms of the collaborative inquiry described in this study, and form part of the Discussion because they reflect an improved understanding of inquiry processes. They include small groups, meeting for a half-day, five or six times during a school year and with release time provided either by the union or the school district. Enabling conditions include meeting space outside of the school environment, with food provided. In terms of structures and processes, groups are facilitated, but both facilitation and leadership roles can shift among participants at different times. Structures (duration of meetings, numbers in groups, facilitation) and processes (to encourage participation, and equity in the group) have been designed to be flexible and adaptable, and are used to encourage group discourse. Groups build safety and create empathy and confidence while individuals take risks, in part by sharing confidences, self-doubts and concerns, and by offering and accepting challenges.

In these ways, inquiry groups are moving from private to public spaces. As an inquiry group participant, facilitator, and coordinator, I know more about inquiry group structures and processes because of my experiences over time and I have learned more during this research, realizing that structures and processes have frequently been constructed by those involved in inquiry, and reflect skills of participation and facilitation. Curiously, I now feel that I have greater influence yet less control over inquiry groups than I had in, say, the mid-1990s, which seems appropriate given the reflections on distributed leadership elsewhere in this study. Reduced control has occurred because others have taken leadership and facilitation roles during inquiry groups. Increased influence has
occurred because I feel more confident and capable in supporting inquiry, and as a result more able to contribute to discussions about inquiry.

For all its informality and sociability, setting up and completing inquiry successfully requires skill and understanding of processes, not only by those designing and facilitating inquiry but by all those who participate. The reverse is also true - unsuccessful inquiry likely stems from either the actions of those who design/facilitate or from those who participate. Much as Fenstermacher and Richardson (2005) argued that one of the factors required for student success was ‘willingness and effort by the learner’, so too might it be argued that inquiry group participants need similar levels of willingness and effort if inquiry groups are to succeed. This study has shown that the skill of participants to engage in inquiry group approaches, as well as the skill of the facilitator, have both proven to be important factors of the groups’ success. The capacity and growth of participants in inquiry groups has not been a major focus of the literature, and deserves more attention. The literature tends to stress the role of ‘critical friend’ as the person responsible for facilitating and leading a group. Yet this study has identified times when participants took on roles of both leadership and facilitation, and has shown that shared or distributed leadership contributed to the group’s successful inquiry. Skills of leadership were demonstrated, for example, when participants in the Multiliteracies research introduced ideas which led the group into new areas of discourse, such as the focus on context, or insights into the nature of collaboration. This leadership is a leadership of ideas rather than hierarchy, leading the group by articulating thinking into areas not previously explored. Skilled and experienced educators often demonstrate these skills in their teaching, so it comes as little surprise that they extend them to inquiry groups. These
findings link to and support much of the literature on new forms of leadership and 'flattened' hierarchies found in both the educational and business literatures (Lieberman & Grolnick, 1997; Rhodes et al., 2001; Linden, 2003). Leadership, in both this study and in the selected literature, is a skill, not a person, and builds collective rather than individual capacity. It is not owned and controlled by an individual but shifts as needed, so that the skill for those participating in inquiry groups is to know when to take leadership, and when to cede it.

In addition to considering concepts and contexts of teacher inquiry, this discussion includes some consideration of future directions. If, as argued above, we can both build on the existing literature and consider different ways of approaching inquiry that are considered in this research, what can be offered in terms of considerations for the future?

First, there is a plethora of books and articles on 'how to do teacher inquiry or Action Research'. There is little need to add to this in terms of general approaches to data collection, or analysis, but this literature should still be accessed by individuals conducting inquiry and by organizations supporting them.

Data from this study shows that the collaborative inquiry of the BCTF projects between 1992 and 2002, as well as the Multiliteracies and 'Diversity' projects of 2002-2006, has incorporated many of those factors considered relevant to adult learning needs in the literature, including 'having time to engage in sustained reflection' (UK Dept of Education and Science, 2001); 'self-direction in learners' (Imel, 1998); and Warfield et al.'s (2005) view of adults as 'autonomous learners'. These factors also strongly suggest
that the inquiry experience is one of professional, not staff, development, with the professionalism and autonomy of the learner respected, and with participants taking control of their own learning needs. However, the study also asserts that teacher autonomy should be tested in public spaces, both by exposure to peers within collaborative groups, and through presentations and publications. This research therefore supports the assertion of Eagleton (2003) that teachers should not seek or promote autonomy without judgment and in isolation from their peers, but that autonomy should be perennially tested and challenged in constructive and public debates, thereby honing teacher judgment in more collaborative spaces.

Relationships appear as crucial to inquiry groups as they do to teaching. Both of the groups from which data were collected in 2006 were formed on a foundation of existing and positive professional relationships, but also introduced new participants to the inquiry process. While data from these studies show the importance of relationships within inquiry groups, such a view is not prominent in the literature. This study brings the human element of relationship to the fore as one basis of inquiry groups’ success or failure. While much of the literature focuses on process, this study has found utility in a greater focus on people and their professional relationships during the period of inquiry. The difference is important. There appears to be an assumption in much of the literature that if the processes are correct, the inquiry will work. This study provides evidence that whatever processes are in place, human relationships can provide an inquiry group with a positive foundation for generating discourse and improved understanding, especially when some positive relationships already exists at the start of the inquiry. But, and this is a limitation to the study, there is no evidence from the data that difficult or problematic
relationships within inquiry groups actually break them. In the fourteen years of inquiry
groups documented and analyzed in this study, I have no data or recollection of long-
standing problematic professional relationships within inquiry groups. Not having any
analysis of such relationships may be a factor limiting the utility of this study, but it may
also be a testament to the professionalism of those BC educators participating in inquiry
approaches to professional development.

One area of building relationships that is under-explored in this study involves the use of
humour in inquiry groups. Coding and analysis of qualitative data tends to have
minimized the amount of humour within the groups studied here, yet when I observed
video data and even reflected on projects, humour was always present and a crucial part
of building relationships. Humour broke moments of tension, and was at times
deliberately used in this way. We could laugh at ourselves, at incongruities, and by
laughing we connected and we relaxed. Inquiry, like theatre, needs catharsis, and this can
be provided by humour.

Inquiry groups need both good and flexible processes to build relationships and to
facilitate inquiry. They also need people who can build trust and confidence as
relationships develop and mature. In several of these areas, the business literature on
collaborations and strategic alliances has offered useful information which can be utilized
by inquiry groups. While we have all the process and methods literature we need in terms
of inquiry, relationships within inquiry groups are minimally explored, as though they are
assumed positive or neutral. If this study has offered some evidence that relationships
within inquiry groups have positive effects, then the issue of relationships, good or bad,
are worth more consideration. Yet there is little discussion of relationships in the Action Research literature, and need substantially more exploration of this component is needed.

The inquiry approaches documented in this study evolved in part because of the transition from initiatives solely involving the teachers' union to collaborative inquiry projects involving the union collaborating with school districts and a university. Two questions are addressed here in terms of this evolution. First, why is this of any importance? Second, how does the approach to inter-organizational collaboration in this study connect to concepts described in the literature on networks and collaborations?

The evolution towards partnership and collaboration links to an area of literature that suggests such approaches will become increasingly important in school systems of the future (OECD, 2001, 2003; Hargreaves, 2003). Literature from both education and business states that partnerships are necessary because individual organizations often cannot achieve a desired end either because they do not have the resources or because they need other organizations to fill gaps in their knowledge or capacity to generate or disseminate products or knowledge. I argue that both rationales are relevant to the partnerships in both the Multiliteracies and the Diversity projects. The Diversity project was co-financed by union and school districts. The Multiliteracies project's path to local union approval, its accessing of union facilities and staff, were all facilitated by the BCTF's participation. Dissemination of information about both projects has been supported by union communication systems, both because the union has published teachers' reports but also because the BCTF web site has linked to the UBC
Multiliteracies web site. Thus collaboration has moved beyond partnership to conduct inquiry but has also involved dissemination of project reports.

As the union starts to collaborate more with school districts and universities, it is important that such collaborations are considered not only in the context of relevant literature but also in the context of a province where collaborations and partnerships which have involved the BCTF are rare. These partnerships offer some hope of increased collaboration between educational organizations and the teachers' union in BC, to potentially improve what can be at best considered a fractious political climate.

The changing and increasingly collaborative nature of teacher union inquiry connects to two themes in this study. One of these concerns the nature of collaboration, in this case involving different organizations rather than individuals within the inquiry group. A second theme is that the union too is moving from private to public spaces, moving out of isolation and into projects where it conducts research with partners. Such a move extends organizational thinking because it takes then union out of its ‘union-only’ (private) space into the more collaborative discourse (public) in the partnership.

There is much to learn from the literature and from the empirical data that connect to the first theme, collaborations between organizations. This literature examines the components of collaboration, seeking to determine what makes collaborations succeed or fail, which might improve dialogue and sharing, and which might support teaching and learning, knowledge dissemination and mobilization, and school improvement (Hopkins, 2003). Both the education and business literatures offer analysis of factors which can
support such collaborations. This includes changing notions of leadership (Rhodes et al., 2001), especially non-hierarchical and distributed leadership (Linden, 2003), ways of building trust (Inkpen & Carrall, 2004), and issues of commitment and control (Paris & Sasson, 2002). As the union has initiated and may continue or expand its collaborations, such issues merit consideration because they help to build understanding of issues and approaches that can facilitate or debilitate partnerships with other organizations in the future. By offering its analyses of the inquiry and collaboration literature, the union might also make a contribution in ways that may encourage other organizations to collaborate. Just as Giroux (1988) and Scheffler (1968) argued for the development of teachers as intellectuals, so might a teachers’ union develop its intellectual capacity by accessing, analyzing and publishing its examination and analysis of literatures which build understanding of inquiry and collaboration. By conducting and publishing accounts of inquiry linked to analyses of literature, teacher unions need not just access literature—they can create it. By becoming contributors to the academic literature, teacher unions can better position themselves to influence it, and to be seen as constructive contributors to the general understanding of inquiry and collaboration. This kind of publishing might change perception of how unions might be viewed internally (by teachers who are union members) and externally (by districts, community, government). Many teachers might welcome such contributions as reflecting a ‘union of professionals’ in a tangible and professional manner. External organizations might find unions less easy to categorize and isolate as industrial proponents of their members’ needs and interests when faced with competent contributions to and analyses of current educational literature from teacher unions.
In terms of the current study, there is evidence that leadership in both Multiliteracies and Diversity projects reflects non-hierarchical and distributed approaches to leadership. The utility of this research and its link to the literature is that both individuals within inquiry groups, and organizations, can now better position themselves to extend understanding and thinking about leadership. This research therefore appears timely in that it enables the union to build leadership approaches which are heralded in the literature as those necessary for schooling in the future. By focusing on and developing distributed leadership, the union can empower its members and support them as they take leadership in conceptual, facilitative, presenting or publishing roles.

The union, and any other organization, can therefore use this research to better understand the nature of distributed leadership, and how this might be developed and improved within its inquiry groups, and possibly within other areas of organizational activity. But there might be a second use for the evidence that distributed leadership has utility. Lessard and Brassard’s (2005) study argued that Canada’s provinces reflected a continuum of relationships between organizations in public education systems, from confrontational to collaborative. BC, unsurprisingly, appeared at the ‘confrontational’ end of the spectrum. In the more collaborative provinces, there appeared to be evidence of greater levels of consultation, arguably reflecting forms of distributed leadership. Similarly, in a (2005) conference speech, the New Brunswick Deputy Minister of Education, John Kershaw, stated that policy cannot be dictated because government “needs partners to assist in the design and implementation of this policy approach”. This speaks to a form of distributed leadership across organizations, where policy and implementation is developed more collaboratively.
Thus, the notion of distributed leadership might be applied in terms of provincial policy and implementation, an unlikely scenario in the current BC political context, but one worth considering when the current political context changes. This may occur if a government changes its stance, as has arguably occurred in BC since the last provincial election, with a less ideological and confrontational stance, or when a government changes. An example of increased and more genuine levels of consultation occurred in Ontario after the defeat of the Harris Conservative government. However, while the link between great consultation and increased use of distributed leadership may be implicit in my argument, it is not assured or automatic. The key point is that distributed leadership can occur within and across organizations, and could offer a different approach to the operation of provincial education systems, perhaps with a teachers' union taking leadership in the area of teacher inquiry, and building system capacity to support inquiry in partnership with school districts and universities.

While the application of the business literature to this study of educational collaboration may appear unusual, I would argue that this literature has been shown to be of utility and adds to our understanding of networks and collaborations which might occur in educational settings. It adds to our understanding of cross-organizational collaboration and notions of leadership by examining what works and what has been shown to fail. I argued in my analysis of the Action Research literature that this literature had grown somewhat insular over time. By expanding the literature review in this study to include relevant business literature, I also argue that some attempt has been made to venture beyond a narrow range of literature, not just to avoid insularity but to make a case that the literature has utility to illuminate the central research questions of this study. Networks
and collaborations involving educational organizations can benefit from analyses of those organizations which have formed alliances, in whichever sector, to consider both the promise and the perils of collaboration.

However, there is one key weakness in the business literature. It is possible to argue that organizationally-sanctioned inquiry collaborations may result in limited critical analysis because organizations, most with hierarchical management control, may exert influence or control over inquiry groups. One of the major weaknesses of the business literature on collaboration is its avoidance of exploring vested interests, and any detailed consideration of when self-interest could rupture collaborative ventures. In partial defence of this literature, its focus is primarily on collaboration not reflective inquiry, so that it most likely involves product development rather than inquiry into specific practices. The key reason to access the business literature is to consider pragmatics of process and relationship, to take what can be used while recognizing its limits.

In exploring the possible application of the potential control of inquiry by organizations, it is worth considering how organizations involved in educational collaborations might negatively impact inquiry approaches they initially sanctioned. School districts and unions might potentially thwart teacher inquiry that threatens established district or union policies or programs. A school district may be hesitant to make public inquiry findings which challenges government positions, or sets them at odds with neighbouring school districts. A union might be concerned if an inquiry group under its sponsorship provided evidence and built a case for advocacy or action different to an established stance of the union, perhaps by a different analysis of a job role or an educational context. This links to
Habermas's (1992) argument that formal organizations cannot be democratized by making them more public, and that communicative action (inquiry groups being one form of communicative action) should develop outside of formal organizational structures. If inquiry groups were to follow Habermas's view, it might at first sight appear that no teacher inquiry would be developed within organizational structures and with organizational support. Yet the inquiry groups in this study were sponsored by several organizations, and their approaches in some cases challenged orthodoxies, albeit primarily outside the sponsoring organizations. The strength of the inquiry approach was in its combating teacher isolation, in taking teaching to a more public space, and in shifting participants' thinking and understanding. These factors then better position inquiry participants to challenge orthodoxies. By so doing, they contribute to democratic discourse within civil society, a key focus of Habermas. The question remains whether the inquiry groups, while sponsored by a union, were in some ways marginal to the union, or even operating outside of its organizational norms. And what would happen to such organizational support if inquiry groups were to challenge union, district or university orthodoxies? If John Elliott believes that the goal of inquiry is to change the world, then inquiry groups which fail to lodge challenges to their own school districts, unions or universities are setting a very low bar for any challenges to world order. Organizations can and should in some cases be challenged by inquiry groups. The key is not whether inquiry groups should avoid such challenges (they should not), but in how organizations deal with dissent which may challenge their norms and policies.

In considering this question, it is possible to argue that unions and universities may have more experience of dissenting voices than do school districts. Union meetings frequently
include lively debates on policies and approaches, often with oppositional views heard
before a vote is taken to decide an approach favoured by the majority of those in
attendance. Universities espouse academic independence, and often have oppositional
views ensconced within departments and reflected in a range of research and
publications. School districts, on the other hand, have arguably fewer democratic forums,
a greater dominance of hierarchical management, and few examples of offering
competing views in public forums other than at the governance level in school district
trustee meetings. Within the administration of school districts, open differences are less
likely to emerge. It is unlikely that a Superintendent and Principal would engage in public
debate, perhaps one arguing for accountability measures linked to standardized tests and
the other arguing for a system accountable for meeting individual needs. Hence, the
norms of discourse in unions and universities, where differences are common and
commonly debated, may be lacking in school district administrative structures.

Yet this assertion may give too positive an impression of unions and universities, and too
pessimistic a view of school districts. Not all union decisions are made in democratic
forums, so that unions could through administrative measures avoid funding teacher
inquiry, or allocating staff to support it. University faculties could use their academic
independence to focus on state initiatives rather than forming any connection to teacher
inquiry, or might fail to support potential challenges from practitioners to state mandates
or district policies.

The issue of organizational reactions to challenges from inquiry is largely hypothetical,
with no evidence from this study to inform it. Yet this study, through its examination of
organizations moving from private to public spaces, might legitimately pose and discuss questions about how organizations might debate how they might deal with challenges from inquiry. Perhaps such a debate could start with a consideration of the chilling article by Achinstein and Ogawa (2006), where one teacher was fired for dissenting from district norms even though a strong case could be made that the district’s policy of mandating a uniform district reading program was harmful to meeting students’ needs if applied in her classroom. While this dissent was not directly linked to inquiry, it was connected to the teacher’s reflection on how to best meet student needs, a view that clearly clashed with those held by the district. The example illustrates why moving into public space might challenge both individual organizations and orthodoxies. Little wonder, then, that teacher inquiry is not sanctioned by many organizations with strong orthodoxies and which wish to exercise control. Dissent implies moving into public space, to challenge a practice, a context or a policy. Dissent is an act of human agency, an expression of judgment and an engagement in public spaces. Inquiry producing dissenting voices is both feasible and desirable because such dissent feeds democratic discourse and increases participation in democratic processes while also reducing the risk of totalitarian orthodoxies.

Is it possible that dissenting discourse might develop judgment within organizations, or might individuals within an organization assume organizational norms - a form of ‘groupthink’ - and fail to exercise judgment apart from that which complies with the collective norms? The issue of challenge to organizations from inquiry, and how they deals with dissent, is informed to some extent by the works of Arendt and Habermas, yet the issue has yet to be explored in depth. Van Aalst’s (2003) discussion of tacit knowledge may be relevant here if one considers that tacit knowledge might also include
conformity to organizational collective norms. I argue that inquiry groups can potentially challenge organizational norms, and that such challenges might be welcomed rather than suppressed by both school districts and teacher unions. However, organizations might consider how they deal with dissent other than through hierarchical control. Do organizations engage and deal respectfully with dissent? Is it encouraged as part of organizational norms, or discouraged, either overtly or through the tacit understanding common in many organizations? These questions are not addressed in this study, but might merit some consideration as a result of it.

Considering the notion of a teacher union's move from private to public space is less easy to connect with areas of the literature because the relevant literature is addressing human and individual agency, not the agency of organizations. Nevertheless, the union's shift from private to public space parallels the shift by individuals in the inquiry groups. The collaborations provided a more open but not totally public space in which union staff were participants. Similarly district/university personnel moved outside of their organizational boundaries by collaboration with the union – another move into more public space. By moving outside one's organization it is likely that different conversations occur than might take place purely within a union, a school district or a university. Van Aalst (2003) and Cullen et al. (2000) discussed the nature of 'tacit knowledge', suggesting that when individuals from different organizations collaborate, they bring such tacit knowledge of their organization's norms and approaches to the collaboration. This implies that different conversations may occur within an organization, where individuals share tacit knowledge of norms and processes. Yet while I was often left with a sense that quite different norms and conversations existed within school
districts, universities and unions, this has not been explored adequately in this study, and would be a promising focus for future research. Do such differing norms exist, and if so, what happens when they come together in some form of network or collaboration? How might differences be dealt with, accepted or resolved? The business literature (Cullen et al., 2000; Parise & Sasson, 2002; Inkpen & Currall, 2004) offers a starting point for this debate but there needs to be a greater focus both on cultures and contexts in school districts, teacher unions and universities in future research exploring cross-organizational collaborations involving these types of organizations.

Within the spaces provided by cross-organizational collaborations, there exists some sense of confidentiality, some ‘safe’ space within the collaboration where issues can be raised and challenges made. This reflects another example of a move from more private (discussion within an organization) to more public (discussion involving people from several organizations) spaces. From there, participants may move into even more public spaces. One example of this from this study is in terms of one inquiry group’s actions in preparing for presenting and reporting. The Multiliteracies Case Study (written collectively by the research team) was read and discussed, sometimes challenged, by the university faculty involved in the overall project. This occurred in meetings between the authors and the university faculty, when the inquiry group invited a critique of their report. The participants therefore were moving from the private space of the group into a more public space involving university faculty before publishing their Case Study on the web, possibly the most public of all spaces. They are using their agency to make decisions to do this, conscious acts of will to invite discussion and critique, to go beyond the safe boundaries of their group. This mirrors Arendt’s view of the utility of the moving
gradually into more public spaces, in this case with the inquiry group becoming the first public space, with the academic input and critique an expansion into a second and more public arena, and the web-published report as the third public space.

All of the Diversity group participants shared ideas on approaches, successes and problems with their inquiry in videoconferences using facilities and equipment owned by the union and accessed without cost to the project or participants. These videoconferences were one step in going more public by engaging in discourse outside of the individual group as other groups and union staff participated in the discussions. Presentations by ‘Diversity’ teams to an audience of trustees, school and district administrators, and to other teachers also reflects the shift out of groups’ private and perhaps sheltered space to a more public space where others can hear, judge, and pass comment on the inquiry groups’ efforts. Such acts were conscious and deliberate: the inquiry groups wanted to go outside their space and engage more widely, just as the individuals sought to expand their isolated and private space of teaching by participating in the inquiry groups. Thus, the notion of ‘going public’ permeated projects throughout the fourteen years where data were collected for this study, and became an important concept in the inquiry groups. The evidence suggests that such a move into public space benefits both researchers and educational systems. It benefits the researchers by extending their inquiry, by promoting clear articulation, and by inviting further discourse, including critiques. It benefits education systems because it brings the particular focus of teacher inquiry to the wider arena, encouraging a more public focus on a range of educational approaches and in terms of considering inquiry as a form of professional development.
Any form of collaborative teacher inquiry is not automatically valuable professional development, but I would argue that that data from most of the projects, especially the Multiliteracies and Diversity projects, offer evidence that these particular inquiry experiences were valuable and useful professional development experiences. How do we know? First, the participants tell us so by rating their experience in these inquiry projects highly, clearly articulating their view that inquiry was professional development, and stating their preference for inquiry over other forms of professional development. They were valuable experiences, because there exists evidence that they involved and extended teachers’ thinking about their work and their students in ways that they state helped them to improve or to better understand what they taught and how they taught it. They stated that their learning connected to their view of what ‘good’ schools should be – schools that welcomed all students, promoted individual learning and did not allow standardized norms of programs or assessment to control teaching and learning.

Educators in the Multiliteracies and Diversity projects clearly connected the ‘means’ of inclusive education to the ‘end’ of an inclusive and participatory society as reflected in the work of Cuban (2003) and Yinger (2005). This reflects a distinct shift and evolution in the inquiry approaches explored in this study from the earlier projects (1992-2002), where the ‘ends’ of education were rarely considered. In arguing that the inquiry experience is of value to participants and to education systems, I suggest that value include utility but goes beyond it, to include those areas such as value such as increased personal and professional growth, amply demonstrated in the comments of participants in this research.
A second reason to argue that these inquiry approaches reflect value and utility is that the groups closely mirror Randi and Zeichner’s (2004) notion of good teacher research groups which ‘balance between respect for and challenge of perspectives’. I would argue that they reflect the most positive aspect of learning communities, yet no group consciously adhered to Dufour’s (2005) exhortations to follow his widely-marketed concept of professional learning communities. These groups were more akin to Hargreaves’ (2003) notion that groups ‘build professional skill and capacity’ over time. They were learning communities because they found ways to extend their own thinking and the thinking of others through thoughtful, purposeful and critical reflections linked to a better understanding of their work and of how students learn.

If an argument can be made that these approaches to inquiry involved valuable and useful professional development, then individuals and organizations in educational systems have a greater capacity to develop inquiry approaches and to contribute to the literature because they have greater understanding of the concepts and contexts of teacher inquiry through this research. It is possible to show examples of what meeting adult learning needs looks like. Structures which best support inquiry, such as a small group meeting over time, can be identified with time release. Similarly, it is possible to discuss processes (facilitation, distributed leadership) which support inquiry, and build them more readily.

The study also illustrates that context may be a significant factor which impacts inquiry approaches. Much of the literature on Action Research manages alludes to but under-explores context unless to argue that Action Research is at risk through centralized
mandates requiring implementation not reflection (Kincheloe, 2003), or that ‘market’ approaches to education ‘leaves less space for emancipatory possibilities’ (Groundwater-Smith, 2005) which are claimed to be offered by Action Research. Yet it was found during this study that better understanding of context was crucial to the success of the inquiry, and that context might enable or constrict inquiry participants in addressing issues of practice which are dominated or framed by contexts. Participants were enabled when the context of one school’s design facilitated communication and sharing. It occurred when participants realized some contexts could be changed, or practices initiated or extended to challenge a dominating context. In one instance, the establishment of an in-school network compensated for the isolation caused in part by a school’s design. Participants were encouraged when their district and/or their union supported their inquiry, and were discouraged when participants felt they did not. When work became a ‘treadmill’, repetitive and hard, with minimal time for reflection, such a context reduces the capacity of teachers to engage in inquiry. Context may be the unaddressed factor in inquiry processes, both within groups and in the literature.

In both the Multiliteracies and Diversity project, the groups made a conscious decision to focus on context, to collect data about it, and to reflect on those data in discussion. We did this because context influenced practice, so it became impossible to consider practice but not context. Was context somehow fixed and immovable? Perhaps, but my sense now is that it is not, that every context can be better understood and often challenged through inquiry because contexts are human constructs and they can be changed. I would suggest that we might, through inquiry, challenge and change significant areas of context, so that inquiry groups become agents of change by moving into yet another more public space –
context – from the reflection of their own practice. Changing context could, of course, be an interim target, with world change, as suggested by Elliott (2005) being the next target. Future inquiry approaches and the connected literature may need to explore context in more detail, to consider what is enabling and what constricts. What enabling factors might be built on to support collaboration, reflection, practice? Which constricting contexts might be changed, and which are too dominant to challenge? One dilemma was reflected in the several incidents where Multiliteracies participants decided not to engage with some educators they considered hostile or with such very different views of how to teach children that collaboration was avoided, or very formal processes initiated instead of the preferred informal communication. In this context, the need for addressing the problematic context is clear but is not taken, and so the context persists as an influence, resulting in a less satisfactory approach being taken to meeting students’ needs. Context can include buildings, people, the nature of a job, a school district, or union policies, hierarchies of schools or organizations, clashes of personality or ethos. It can be a factor which in some cases controls and in other cases can be challenged and changed. But this study has found that context was more dominant in terms of its influence on inquiry than anticipated, and that it required focus and reflection to understand its impact on the inquiry approach.

Context also connects to two of the factors identified by Fenstermacher and Richardson (2005). These are ‘a social surround supportive of teaching and learning,’ and the ‘opportunity to teach and learn’. Fenstermacher and Richardson argue that these factors need to be present to engage students and to enable them to be successful learners. Similarly, Cuban (2003) discussed educational contexts such a system funding, the health
of children, and other factors that influence the capacity for teaching and learning. As teachers understand more of these contexts through their inquiry, then conditions for students’ success are more likely to be addressed through inquiry. If contextual factors are crucial to student learning, and if teacher inquiry is linked to students’ learning, then understanding context is potentially a crucial part of inquiry. The issue is not that the connection I have made is particularly difficult, but that it is rarely made in either the professional development or the inquiry literatures, with Hyland and Noffke (2005) an exception in the inquiry literature. The Action Research literature has an extensive focus on Social Justice issues, but such a focus is not the same as a focus on context. Context might include issues of race class, poverty and gender, but it might also include teacher workload and staffing levels, teacher roles and interactions, class size and composition, positive or negative relationships within schools, differing views on the goals of education, or on styles of teaching and learning.

I am arguing that the focus of professional development, particularly in inquiry, should not just be on the individual being ‘developed’, but on the context in which she or he works. In this research, such contexts were explored in some depth as participants sought to better understand how their practices were shaped by context, and which contexts they might change. But this focus on context could also be one factor in explaining why inquiry approaches are disliked and often repressed by central governments which control education systems (Groundwater-Smith, 2005; Kincheloe, 2003). Simply put, central governments create and control much of the context that impact learners and teachers, and have no interest in encouraging any challenge to such contexts,
The Action Research literature (Carr & Kemmis, 2005) states or implies that teachers need to engage in a political struggle “to create the material conditions for a free, open and democratically constructed practical discourse to emerge as a context for professional action” (Elliott, 2005, p. 363). This study suggests another route, however, less aggressive and confrontational, but one which potentially challenges centralized mandates by building collaboration and potentially coalitions across the normally discrete boundaries of unions, school districts and universities. Such coalitions could be an extension of collaborations which learn from inquiry and which build cases based on evidence for approaches to learning and teaching that may differ from those mandated. In this theoretical and possibly unlikely brave new world, collaboration starts with discussion of data collection methods, analysis and reporting but moves to building strategy and creating influence in education systems. It builds on the intellect of teachers (Scheffler, 1968) but addresses context in order to change it, and uses the collective agency of educational organizations to pressure governments, to inform community, and to change mandates. It also requires collaborative approaches to knowledge dissemination and mobilization, with common strategies being developed to influence policy. To date, the collaborations considered in this research have not involved such strategic thinking, yet it could offer areas of promise for unions, districts and universities, increasing their influence on shaping provincial education policy.

The shift from private to more public spaces has been a more important aspect of this research than I anticipated. Indeed, I will argue that the shift is central to good teacher inquiry approaches. What does such a shift actually entail and what is its significance? In this study, it relates to both individuals and organizations moving from private into public
space. As the organizational shift has been discussed above, the following section considers the shift for individuals in inquiry groups. A collaborative inquiry group reflects one form of community, in which individuals move out of that private space exemplified by isolation in teaching. Arendt’s view that humans need to develop judgment and express agency, and that both need to be tested in safe spaces, is crucial to understanding the need for shifting from private to public spaces in collaborative inquiry groups. Yet Arendt’s view was that judgment and agency should also be developed and expressed beyond the safety of family or small group and in a larger community.

Participants in the Multiliteracies and Diversity projects moved both into the somewhat sheltered but still more public space of the group and into the greater community beyond the group by presenting and publishing their inquiry.

Collaborative inquiry groups move an individual into a more public space – ‘spaces for dialogues’ (Coulter, 2002) - simply because others are present in it. Being socialized into this more public space depends partly on the skill of the facilitator, but also on the participation and relationship skills of every participant. Evidence from this study suggests that groups appeared successful in moving into a productive public space in part because they incorporated active listening, empathy and challenge. But simply having others in a room for discussion does not mean that the above factors will be present. There may be no active listening, and therefore no extension of thinking which active listening can precede. There may be apathy or hostility, or everybody may always agree and fail to challenge the thinking of others. Within these groups there was no hostility or apathy, but there were challenges of ideas. Moving into more public space requires more
than the physical act of being together in that space if the shift is to have value and utility, requiring engagement which is both purposeful and skilful.

Going more public in an inquiry group therefore entails engagement in particular ways, especially in terms of active listening, empathy and challenge. We cannot exercise judgment or agency without ways to test both, and inquiry groups at their best can provide a safe but challenging space to do this if the engagement includes the factors identified above. Groups are safe when ground rules such as confidentiality are developed and respected. They are challenging when relationships have been built to a level where challenges to ideas and practices can be offered without negatively affecting relationships within the group. The Multiliteracies and Diversity groups provided multiple examples of teachers building their capacity to exercise judgment and agency, and in all cases such judgment was in terms of their own work. Judgment in these inquiry groups was therefore about self, not others, though participants incorporated contextual factors and issues into the inquiry process. In terms of agency, those engaged in inquiry groups appeared to build both confidence and sophistication in understanding actions and contexts which were reflected in their writing and presentations. In these public forums they became advocates of the inquiry approach to professional development by providing evidence of their deep reflection on their own practice in ways that explicitly connected to students' learning, and to their growth as educators.

Presenting and reporting inquiry approaches are examples of moving inquiry into more public spaces. Any presentation or reporting extends the community beyond the initial inquiry group, thereby shifting the ground from relatively private (within the group) to
more public (an audience) to fully public (web reporting or hard copy publication). Reporting was a condition of participating in projects supported and sponsored by the BCTF, and was communicated at the starting point of project. But while reporting involves those individuals engaged in the inquiry becoming more public, it also involves the nature of inquiry being shifted into more public space. By reporting an inquiry project an individual or a group is also reporting the inquiry methods and concept as well as the findings, exposing both to external scrutiny and potential critique. And because the union (and perhaps school districts and universities) is the sponsor of the inquiry, then the union comes under scrutiny also. Such scrutiny should be welcomed by organizations as part of the inquiry approach if those working in organizations have understood the nature of going public in ways discussed here.

If organizations are to exercise agency in support of teachers' professional inquiry, then organizations need to keep going public, sharing their methods and their findings. Going public for a union, school district, or university, means going beyond organizational boundaries, and testing claims and knowledge in communities of discourse wider than those within the individual organization. This may involve taking risks, and understanding that not all reactions will be positive or uncritical. In this context, university faculties have the greatest experience of going public, as they publish their work. Staff from both school districts and unions need to follow their lead, and to learn from them. But university faculty might also consider building and supporting alternative publishing options, likely web-based, which might attract more publication of educators' reporting of inquiry.
Going public with inquiry could have major benefits for a teacher union. In asking research questions, and dealing with levels of uncertainty, the union models professionalism linked to improving teaching and meeting students’ needs. Rather than being a perennial critic of policies and approaches it allows a union to engage in questioning, searching for evidence, participating in discourse, where it seeks for knowledge and for answers. More extensive participation in inquiry projects would present a different profile of teacher unions in Canadian provinces’ public spaces, and may build respect for unions frequently embattled and isolated in educational discourse. It could even be considered a strategic move, to shift some union attention to developing more professionally focused projects, and through inquiry, to be part of the exploration of both the means and the ends of educational practices. At a time of rapid demographic change in teacher populations, such a shift in focus, accompanied by a shift in resources and staffing, might have considerable appeal to the many new teachers arguably less interested in the union’s former battles and arguably dominant industrial focus.

The capacity to reach a greater understanding of teacher inquiry approaches places the BCTF in a position to expand its support for teacher inquiry. If the union better understands these approaches and issues, and plans to build future experiences where the organization learns more about them, then the union can create inquiry as professional development based on this growing knowledge and capacity. It can ensure that inquiry goes more public, either through publication and presentations, or by networking with other inquiry groups. The BCTF has invested in this process of research into collaborative teacher inquiry. Now it needs to discuss its capacity to engage in a more substantive way and offer leadership through increased investment and staffing.
Do the inquiry approaches undertaken challenge system orthodoxies other than those of participating organizations as discussed above? The simple answer is ‘Yes’. They do so in a number of ways, one of which is by focusing on the ‘particular’, whether this be a teacher practice, an assessment idea, or a way of using picture symbols. Focusing on the particular may not be encouraged in systems with large-scale assessments and standardized testing and where a focus on the particular student, practice or context may result in discovery that individual needs are not met by standardized pedagogy such as packaged approaches to literacy or measures of assessment. Secondly, they challenge orthodoxies because they develop judgment and agency within the group – both of which may not fit easily within systems that expect uniform compliance with state mandates, where the dominant agency has stated the controlling orthodoxy. Finally, by going public, they can actually issue challenges to orthodoxy in a wide and even universally-accessible forum such as the web, an outlet that cannot be controlled by the state.

This study started with a description of a journey through inquiry, and in closing, I return to that metaphorical notion of journey. If I have traveled for 32 years along a path of teacher inquiry, it might be reasonable to assume that I should have reached the destination by now. In part, I have, with this study reflecting a third benchmark of understanding, building on those of 2002 and at the end of the Multiliteracies project, but before the final data collection in 2006. But, of course, the journey goes on with new inquiry and new learning yet to come.

Research such as this involves those methods required by the academy. The collection of empirical data, and an exploration of relevant literature, has provided a basis for better
understanding concepts and contexts of teacher inquiry, and provides a foundation for considering future directions. But just as a postcard cannot portray the essence of a holiday moment – the sound of waves, the scent of a tropical flower - so do I wonder if research can capture the essence of inquiry, or if reporting inquiry captures the entirety of the experience. The inquiry approach has resonated for me, not only because I thought it made great sense of understanding more about my practice, and about education, but also because it involved me in some of the richest and most exciting moments of my professional life, in community with peers, whether in a school, a university, or a union meeting room. When I first started inquiry, I was engaging in thinking through what I taught, why I taught and how I might do teach better. As I realized that the process of inquiry was of great value, so I moved into a role of facilitation and support. But in whatever role, as participant, and as facilitator, the journey was exciting and totally dependent on making the particular inquiry community work with those people in the group.

In a sense, for me inquiry as a journey is the antithesis to the packaged holiday, with less certainty of routes or final destination, choices about both being discussed with friends and decided as we progress. We might stay longer in one place, cut the holiday short in another. It’s less controlled, and a little more risky, but the pleasure and the rewards of the experience seem greater. One may also find that some journeys can just go wrong, perhaps because of quarrels or bad hotels. One journey will not suit everybody, and those in the packaged resorts or taking the packaged PD may view life very differently. But for those who experience inquiry as the kind of journey, I am attempting to describe, the experiences are often memorable for the individual and for the collective of the group.
This study has hopefully shown that many teachers have experienced inquiry, in both ordinary and extraordinary journeys, and that there may be an essence of inquiry at its best that research cannot effectively encapsulate. Perhaps in the future there might be studies which both evoke the spirit of inquiry while also collecting and analyzing empirical data which provide greater understanding.
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