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Susanne Owen
*University of South Australia*

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# THE POWER OF COLLEGIALITY IN SCHOOL-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**Susanne Owen**
**University of South Australia**

## Abstract

The school has increasingly become the focus for teacher professional development and school leaders are maximizing teacher learning through restructuring time and meeting structures to create additional opportunities for collegial work within the school day. This research paper is the second part of a three stage research design investigating South Australian teachers' experiences of school-based professional development and how this relates to emerging trends. This second stage of research focuses on professional development and professional growth, by interviewing fifteen staff in three case study schools to obtain greater detail about the implementation of quality teacher learning strategies. This paper reports some of the findings from the interviews concerning school-based professional development in relation to previous Professional Development research. Using case studies, key issues identified in this report include creating time, teams and the role of leadership, thereby highlighting the power of collegial teacher learning.

## Introduction

*….If we're talking about improving student learning outcomes, it's about improving how teachers teach and expanding the way they think in teaching and learning practice. And that is best done in a collaborative situation. And then it's that, you know, reflective thought and you've got that common knowledge, common understanding…… exploring the issues together with a highly professional person who challenges you to think, you know, beyond your own realm I guess.*

*The thing is you've got that opportunity to talk, to debrief, to reflect, to question, to explore together. And that to me is where the power is. It's that collective visioning, collective debating, collective sharing of ideas. And then, you go back into your class, you try something, you can get back together again and reflect on how it went or how other people implemented the ideas and the successes that they had. And I guess it's the belief in **the power of collegiality** and collective thought that's really prompted us as a school to really strengthen the teaming concept for next year. So I've sort of put this proposal together for staff that really makes the team a self managing team ….And we've sort of identified some focuses for those team meetings which would be about, not nuts and bolts admin issues. It's about learning. It's about reflecting on what you do, how you do it and um, that whole notion of you know, taking on board something new and trying it out in the change process (Interview 11)*

This comment really captures the re-thinking that some schools are doing about their approach to teacher professional development, or as it is popularly called 'PD' or 'T&D' (Training and Development). Professional development has generally been referred to as 'those activities which systematically over a sustained period of time, enable educators to acquire and apply the knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities to achieve personal and organisational goals and to facilitate the learning of students' (Indiana State Teachers Association, 2004). This broad definition encompasses a range of activities from individual teacher reading, to exploring a website, individual or group attendance at a conference, action research in the classroom, the curriculum implementation process particularly with groups, therefore generally including individual, as well as collaborative projects (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2002, p. 46).

Ongoing teacher learning with school-based colleagues is becoming the predominant form of professional development, rather than individual teachers attending one-off conferences. Therefore, professional development involves colleagues over time in the school using a trial and error approach to actively explore new ideas, link previous knowledge with new understandings within broader educational reform, reflect on their classroom practice, and collectively share and discuss educational practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001). Through this process, linked to student learning, curriculum reform deeply embedded in daily school life, new classroom structures and self-managing teacher learning teams, are emerging (Cochram-Smith & Lytle, 2001).

Indeed, research (Hargreaves, 1997) has shown that now more than ever before, teachers need to do their work differently. While each school has a specific social and political context, there are changing public expectations of all students completing secondary school, with teachers catering for a wider range of student needs. There is an emphasis on education linked to technology and workforce change and the increased social responsibility of schools promoting critical thinking and problem solving. Providing expanded academic and social curriculum, also involving parents and being more accountable for educational outcomes is increasingly important (Glickman and Aldridge, 2001; Dinham, 2000).

The school is increasingly believed to be the best place for teacher learning and professional development (NPEAT, 1999). Schools are beginning to restructure to allow more opportunities for teachers to learn together (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). However, not only are the structures changing but also the culture of schools which are starting to become learning communities, also termed communities of practice (Barab & Duffy, 2000).

This paper on teacher learning and professional development, is based on research findings of fifteen interviews of South Australian teachers conducted in 2002 in three case study schools. From all of the experiences that teachers talked about in the interviews, this paper will concentrate on how their schools are beginning to restructure and reculture so that they provide more opportunities for professional development and professional growth within the workplace through collegial relationships. Following presentation of the literature review and research methods, three case studies will be presented to highlight three key themes that emerged from the research, namely creating time, collegial teams and the role of leadership in change.

## Literature Review

Teacher learning and professional development within schools may be framed within learning communities and situativity theories. Situativity theory emphasises learning occurring within a particular social environment, through group discussion, shared understanding and input, as well as practical activities to work with new ideas (Barab & Duffy, 2000). Learning is therefore reinforced when others on-site are involved and share and develop ideas together as happens in the broader social context of communities of practice: '*The meaning that is most personally transformative turns out to be the learning that involves membership in these communities of practice*' (Wenger, 1998, p.6).

In educational terms, in the community of practice, rather than singular visionary leaders, all staff are encouraged to work together to be involved in decision making and develop a shared vision and shared leadership.

This requires a change of culture in many schools, with problems and difficulties being seen as learning opportunities: '*It is clear from the research that teachers believe that their most effective and useful learning occurs through on-the-job experience and reflection. They do not deny the need for outsiders to provide new knowledge and ideas but they are insistent that such new information is useful to them only when it has been tried in the classroom*' (Retallick, 1997, p.36). Therefore, situated learning which is based on situativity theory involves, '*changing the culture of schools so that teaching is a more public practice open to regular discussion among peers*' (Spillane, 2002, p.392).

Similarly, the Center on Policy Research and Evaluation outlines the importance of professional development being incorporated into teachers' work through team teaching and joint curriculum planning; teacher networks of specific professional communities of similar subjects or other commonalities; and teachers as researchers. At the school level this involves focusing PD on teaching and learning to deepen understanding of key concepts; balancing school improvement, career advancement and individual teaching and learning; and providing more time and strengthening teacher roles in planning and delivering PD (CPRE, 1995).

The research of Kenway, Henry, Johnson, Matthews, Blackmore, White, Muhlebach and Bates (1999) on school-wide change and Hargreave's (1997) post-professional models, investigate these situative learning approaches of restructuring and reconceptualizing schools. The school-wide change and post-professional models focus on ensuring teacher ownership of the learning environment, provision of time to address change and to increase school effectiveness. Through balancing

individual/schools/systems needs and experimental risk-taking and reflection, a restructuring of schools may occur and new concepts of schools may emerge. This restructuring and reconceptualizing involves: *'rethinking schedules, staffing patterns and grouping arrangements to create blocks of time for teachers to work and learn together'* (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995)

In summary, schools as workplace learning environments are increasingly being used to establish learning communities and schools are being restructured to become the focus of teacher learning. The research literature (Lewis, 2002; Kenway et al, 1999; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995), consistently identifies effective practices which facilitate teacher professional growth. Interviews are used in this research study to gain an understanding about teacher perceptions of their professional growth experiences. This paper details some findings from the South Australian teacher interview research in three sites, which are recognised for effective professional development programs, resulting in school change and improved student learning outcomes. The purpose of the research is to uncover details about schools as the focus of teacher professional development and teacher learning.

### Method

The focus of this teacher interview research was teachers' perspectives on the school-based professional development programs in terms of their effects on professional growth and teacher learning. The research question is: What are South Australian teachers' experiences of school-based professional development in terms of professional growth?

### The Participants and Procedure

This research involved purposive sampling of Adelaide schools, which have shown a commitment to staff professional development through exploring a range of techniques to improve opportunities for staff to learn together. Within these three sites, interviews were conducted with fifteen teachers who had shown a commitment to their own professional development, with five staff being involved at each site, including the principal and/or professional development manager. The schools have begun to nurture communities of practice/learning organisation cultures through using a shortened school day, developing learning teams, and through leaders who have established shared school improvement learning directions and training opportunities. Teachers from one secondary school, one primary school and a reception to year 10 school were involved.

While a set of questions was available as a guide for some possible areas of exploration, the interviewer encouraged a free flowing conversation, allowing the interviewee to talk, and interrupting at relevant times to seek additional information. Each person was interviewed on one occasion for approximately forty-five minutes, the conversation being tape-recorded and a transcript developed and later checked for accuracy and modifications as desired by the interviewee.

### Analysis

The transcribed interview material was then analyzed to uncover emergent themes, using the NUD*IST software to manage the data coding process as outlined by Cresswell (1997). Firstly, an overall content analysis was conducted on the data from the three schools. Content analysis involved reading several transcribed interviews and identification of a wide range of theme items. Common themes were then grouped into five key areas and numerical codes were developed. These themes were created as nodes and the numerical codes were then entered into the NUD*IST software and a 'tree' of themes and sub-themes was developed. Detailed line-by-line analysis and numerical coding was manually undertaken and then entered onto the transcribed interviews in the software programme as nodes based on short phrases of the text. Through this process, reports for each code could be produced and it was possible to identify the most common issues discussed by teachers and leaders, with a number of these relating to the research literature.

In this paper, the schools involved in the interviews have been renamed to protect their anonymity and the interviews have been numbered to avoid individual teacher identification. The results have been presented as three case studies, based on the data collected in the interviews, with the case study approach enabling various aspects of the school-based teacher learning research to be highlighted.

The case studies will now be presented with the key themes of creating time for teacher learning, collegial team learning and the role of leadership in change, being emphasised.

**Case Study Findings**

**Hillside Secondary School and Creating Time for Teacher Learning**

Hillside is a large metropolitan secondary school of 1100 students including some adults, located in the eastern suburbs of Adelaide. About 40% of students receive government assistance with school fees and approximately 40% of the population are from non-English speaking backgrounds representing 42 cultural groups. The Arts and Information Technology are areas of curriculum specialty. The 2001 year 12 academic results data indicates that 91% of students who had relevant subject combinations attained the South Australian Certificate of Education on completion of schooling. In addition, 81% of those seeking tertiary entrance, received a first round university offer. With over 100 staff, the school has increasingly established a reputation for a focused approach to teacher professional development based on the school, team and individual goals. Hillside is also recognised for experimentation with new ideas:

*This school takes more risks, is prepared to give new things a try. ... We just had a big discussion about a year 8 round table assessment ...... Initially they gave it a small trial last year so that pre-dated me. But that's sort of spread and excited people and has spread now to a whole school activity that we will be doing at the end of the year (*Interview 3)

Professional development linked to the school goals occurs essentially through collegial work in faculties, involving discussion and sharing of programming and methodologies associated with the new curriculum framework for South Australia (SACSA) and practical teamwork to learn from faculty members in upgrading Information Technology skills. In addition, in the interviews, staff talked about the positive attitude of the school administration team towards professional development and the availability of release time for groups of teachers to attend PD linked to school directions. Examples were also given of individual teachers being encouraged by the school leadership to attend career advancement workshops and comments were made about the overall culture of incidental conversations which reflect a teacher learning culture:

*Before school, lunch and recess, if you listen to the conversation, about 90% of them are about students, how can we help this one, what are you doing there and this is related to that. Very incidental but it's definitely professional development* (Interview 2)

To create more time for formalized professional development, the school community restructured and trialled a shortened school day on one day a week in late 2001. This involved reducing each lesson by five minutes, therefore allowing staff meetings to begin up to an hour earlier at 2.30 p.m. The purpose of the shortened school day was to have PD / T&D: '*a time for people to talk and communicate and do some T&D over two hours' (*Interview 2). The shortened school day seems to have been a success. In the review a year later, the essential structure has been retained although with an earlier 4.30 p.m. finish time, and adding a 10 minute break between the two designated meetings to allow for overlap. Another change was made in the order of meetings: '*We put the staff meeting on last rather than first because we found that people were pretty weary after the staff meeting and we wanted them to be more in tune with the learning part rather than the administrivia' (*Interview 1).

The shortened school day includes a range of meetings, with the rotation being decided by the T&D Committee. The rotation includes whole staff meetings (which incorporate systems mandated topics and big picture school strategic directions), faculty meeting time, performance management and an issues session to allow individuals to share conference materials with small groups of interested staff:

*…..you've got a built in time there. And it hasn't only benefited the specific things we did it for, SACSA (*South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability framework) and ICT (*Information and Communications Technology) but other issues like issues of student welfare….. Things like year level issues where you want to talk about contentious issues of student support and so on. You actually have time to really get into those and not feel that you're always being rushed (*Interview 1).

One of the particularly innovative aspects of the shortened school day meeting rotation has been the inclusion of Performance Management, a mandated policy in South Australia, involving development of a professional growth plan linking to broader system, school and current and future work skills. Including Performance Management in the meeting rotation of the shortened school day addresses time concern issues. Hillside has also included some aspects of their performance management program being conducted in teams:

*It's collegiate and they can all talk together, work together and perhaps help another person solve their problem……Staff actively share their goals and classroom practice. Classroom practice evolves quite a lot because it's a good way of reviewing what you're doing as well as suggesting perhaps a better way or if you ask for advice you hear what other people are doing…it's not threatening, it's not judging and that's been very healthy* (Interview 2)

In addition to Performance Management, faculty meeting groups are a key aspect of the shortened school day rotation, allowing time for collaborative work focusing on school directions and meeting individual staff needs. The skills of the faculty manager as a team leader are underlined by interviewee comments:

*….faculty members could work with their own group to focus on needs so that not everybody was doing the same Training and Development at the same time …at some point you still need to keep bringing it back as a whole faculty…..to manage that in such a way that not only the team plan and objectives are met but the school's as well…..to engage in what you're saying in that overall, you know, sense of professionalism and sharing, that T&D knowledge (*Interview 5)

However, there was some indication that not all faculty managers and individuals had established a well- planned program. The importance of a planned PD program (or as referred to here, T&D), is further emphasised by this comment:

*The idea of the shortened school day is useful if it's, if it's approached in a structured manner where you can actually um, work with, as a manager, with the individuals to look at their individual needs and then look at the school needs at the same time and see if you can really match that and at the same time extend the individual…..I also think that you need some planning time before you go straight into the Training and Development…spend some of that time actually mapping out their T&D and doing it….linking it to their performance management* (Interview 5)

It is interesting to note that most interviewees, while recognising the importance of the shared PD approach, and linking all staff to work together to achieve common school goals as per the focus of this paper, still acknowledged the importance of individual skill building and PD.

In addition, individuals have different responses to school-wide change and in the case study school, there is some disquiet among staff about the whole notion of the shortened school day. The disruption and extra pressure associated with getting through the lessons with less time available is an issue because, '*students get into a routine and every Monday that routine's sabotaged. And I see it amongst my teaching colleagues a lot. And they really hate Monday. It's just 5 minutes but it just seems to make everything unnecessarily hasty and people get really tense and stressed*' (Interview 4). Being in several faculties and not being able to attend both meetings when these are scheduled in the meeting rotation is also an issue.

However, there was a sense that the shortened school day was valued by staff and the overall sense is that it '*has helped to establish more of that Training and Development culture' (*Interview 5). Finally, the key factors in the success of the school's professional development programme and the broader benefits are expressed by a member of the leadership team:

*The challenge of professional development is to provide people with the means and the incentive and time to ask why am I doing this and can I do it better. It's actually achieving the things that should be achieved….we've got our strategic plan a lot clearer so that everybody is aware of what we're trying to do and is pretty onside about it from a staff point of view. And that's being reinforced a lot through our professional development ….What's actually happening at those meetings is that people are talking about what they're actually doing in relation to ICT or in relation to SACSA from a personal point of view and that's reinforced with everything else that's happening as well…we're setting the time aside*

*but I think it's also because we're more focused…What we're doing is that there's a lot more examples of teachers sharing their learning with other teachers (*Interview 1*)*

In summary, through using a shortened school day on a once a week basis, Hillside is valuing teacher professional development through creating time for collaborative teacher learning, including links to school direction goals, Performance Management and catering for individual interests.

**Lakeside School and Collegial Team Learning**

Lakeside is a small newly-established metropolitan school of fewer than 200 students.  Located on a university campus, there are few non-English speaking background students or students seeking government assistance with school fees.  The residential area is rapidly expanding and the school's population will double in the next few years, with the overall community concept based on lifelong educational learning and optimal use of Information Technology and telecommunications. Therefore technology, environmental and Aboriginal education, student participation and teaching teams, are focus areas in the school. The school leadership has established a culture of questioning traditional practices and one interviewee notes that, '*no-one's ever said to me before, why can't it be different… Whereas that question is constantly being asked here' (*Interview 8).

The leadership team and school planning directions are focused on catering for the individual needs of student learners and in the interviews, high quality teaching was emphasised as important.  Release time and funding for teacher professional development is generous compared with other schools and the school is exploring ways of creating additional professional development time within the workday. This includes reconfiguring staff meetings to maximize teacher learning time and devising alternative structures, including technological communication and specific scheduled alternative times, for dealing with administration.  Some exciting interstate and overseas site visits in teams to explore new ideas and provide follow-up support have been funded for groups of teachers.  The one-off nature of some visits supports effective PD because generally groups of staff are involved and follow-up discussion can occur:

 *We've also just started to build up a fund now and it's about not having any key teachers in the school…That fund is going back into staff to use for professional development, a visiting program or scholarship time or release time…And we'll get a small group of peers to actually evaluate the submissions…The first three years we've taken a number of staff...we took  them over to New Zealand as a part of just getting them outside of the box* (Interview 6)

Shared decision-making and leadership are embedded in the school culture, and student and parent participation and catering for individual learning, are school priorities.  Rather than working in the traditional isolation of primary school classrooms, staff works in levels of schooling teams with several teachers and classes.  Students are involved in learning communities, beginning the day in a home group and then regrouping throughout the day with other students and teachers so that various student needs are met.  Teachers meet weekly in self-managing teams in the after-school meeting rotation to plan the week's program.  The interview teachers said that, as teachers plan their work together, a lot of informal collegial learning takes place and a common educational direction is developed:

*…. the foundations are now starting to emerge and becoming more and more visible of a culture in the school which is allowing us to build up a team approach to teaching and learning… It hasn't been without its problems and dangers but I think we're now starting to walk the talk in terms of having an early years environment which has broken down some traditional practices e.g. the one to thirty, one to twenty six type of arrangement.  We're now working more as a team and the teachers are now looking at that cohort of students as a group and then breaking them up into all sorts of different ways for different types of activities and areas of learning and so on (*Interview 6).

Incidental learning from observing fellow staff occurs because students are located in the open space environment:  '*Learning from the people around you, learning from the kids and just having those experiences that don't work and all that sort of stuff' (*Interview 8)

Teachers also undertake formalized professional development and learn new teaching skills in collegial teams, and the importance of having a common educational philosophy is underlined:

*...we get on well together as a team so that makes a difference .....and we've all done good things. So at the moment we're working on a unit with our middle school kids on legal studies. They're not really what you would call independent workers in some regards so what we're trying to do is set up a structure that will enable them to follow a process. And S has done this process with her students before over a number of years so the last few team meetings that we've had, have been working through, well what is this unit going to look like. What are we going to expect from the students and what support are we going to give them. And she's been working with us on the way in which she set up her classroom at her previous school. So I guess in a way it's an informal T&D type of session* (Interview 9*)*

Another interviewee discusses the role of the team in Information Technology Professional Development:

*The school works very much in teams....What we've been doing in the middle years team that I work for, is planning a normal program that you would normally plan for those kids and then looking at where ICT can extend the learning of those students (*Interview 7).

Of course working in a team involves some quite complex relationship skills: '*pulling in the same direction*' (Interview 10), being '*able to share ideas freely without feeling they have to be an expert*' (Interview 10), learning from '*other people's mistakes*' (Interview 8). The benefits of collegial teams and the processes involved in working together are underlined in the following interview:

*When you work as a team, you hear about different perspectives on things. You sort of have to sit back and look at something the way someone else is looking at it. Because quite often we have discussions about the particular philosophy or the vision that we all want to adopt or the direction that we all want to go in and something will come up. I don't know, I can't think of an example right now but something might come up about the way the day is structured. And one person has a strong feeling about that and another person has another strong feeling about that and you try to come to some negotiation. And it's interesting because you might not have thought about it from that point of view and things like that are quite interesting rather than just working on your own and doing your own.... I mean it forces us to negotiate and compromise (*Interview 8).

However, while collegial teams sound idyllic, not being in control of your own classroom as the traditional structures allow, and needing to establish a common direction with other teachers, is not without its problems. One teacher noted that some teams were not working as well as others '*their team isn't as cohesive, that tends to be more of an individually-based thing*' (Interview 10).

Nevertheless, the positive nature of the teacher learning and support opportunities provided by collegial teams was strongly evident in the interviews, and the following interview excerpt captures the overall benefits of the team learning culture in the school:

*I think it depends on the day ....but I think ultimately I prefer to work in a team. I mean there are those times when you bang heads and then you think, oh I wish I had control, I wish I could do what I want. But at the same time, it doesn't challenge you and it doesn't give you that support as well. ....here, we're supporting each other with our practice and our programming and our planning and everything and we're in it together which is kind of nice* (Interview 8).

In summary, Lakeside's collegial teaching teams and shared classes involve teachers in learning from each other, shared decision making and incidental learning, with staff meeting time focused on professional development rather than administration and principal leadership providing time and funding for creating learning communities.

**Southside Primary School and the Role of Leadership in Change**

Southside is a southern suburbs metropolitan primary school of around 300 students, approximately half receiving school fees assistance and around 10% being from non-English speaking backgrounds. Psychological health and social skills programs, higher-order thinking programs, literacy and quality and improvement are school-developed foci. These priority directions are explicit and staff professional development is focused around these goals. The school leader is passionate about the importance of teacher learning and in her interview, she indicates that considerable funding is provided

for large groups of staff to attend conferences linked to school priorities, with ongoing support groups being encouraged for follow-up discussion and trialling of new ideas. New ideas are also stimulated through inviting guest speakers to address the whole staff and facilitate discussion regarding issues of whole school relevance:

*…..We this year had E come down from Curriculum and she gave, she ran a session for us on explicit values and related it to futures and it was one staff meeting and we went on for two hours and we could have gone for four hours. The discussion and the dialogue and the debate and the argument in positive ways was just brilliant. ... But it really made us all see how similar we were and how different we were. And I think that that is really healthy. If we're talking in our school about that kind of thing, if we're talking about what's our vision, what's our mission, who are the people that we want to have relationships with in the local community.. There's that sort of professional, we're one team, we're not fragments of teams (*Interview 13).

The role of the school leader in financing PD and funding conference attendance is recognised by staff, *'...usually treats professional development very seriously and so that seems to be a big priority in our budgets and so if there's something we want to attend, that's funded'* (Interview 14).

In addition to providing funding for conference attendance, in recent years the school leader has promoted involvement in an individualised student learning approach, with many staff and school administration members attending at least some of the workshop sessions and challenging traditional teaching methodologies. Many staff have also had some involvement in a two year, department-sponsored quality and improvement project involving action research at both the whole site and individual classroom level. These staff attended a four day conference facilitated by an American presenter, David Langford, who has developed simple data gathering materials, for teachers and students to use in their classrooms:

*I think the best learning comes when the principal and deputy can train with their staff. And, um, that is where the most change has eventuated in our school where we have brought facilitators in or been to do things as a large group like the Quality in Schools program. There were eleven of us that did the David Langford ...,gave them the right sort of environment, then you saw what happened with the kids* (Interview 11)

As well as a whole school focus, with the strong encouragement of the leader, the school is also beginning to explore restructuring into levels of schooling learning communities of up to 120 students and four teachers. In preparing for future change, the school leader has provided weekly release time for the teams, supported by a coordinator, to plan together and develop a common educational philosophy. The process of change, driven by the collegial learning teams, is presented in this interview excerpt:

*So we spent the whole day just sort of looking at class structures, um, jut imagining what our perfect middle school unit might look like, how it might work, what the roles and responsibility of each of the teachers might be within that unit, what a typical day might look like , who's got what skills…the (school) day will be planned so we might have some maths groups going and that will be up on the board. Today's maths groups are fractions, decimals, whatever. Today's english group might be writing in paragraphs, use of verbs. Or whatever. And we might all meet together in the morning for a timetabling session and kids fill in their own timetable about the groups they'll be attending that day and then write your name on a list. So if I was doing mathematics, I would have a list of who should be there. So the kids are accountable* (Interview 14)

In the current process of preparing for restructuring of classrooms, the power of staff working together is clearly evident, with collegial interaction acknowledging the different rates of preparedness for change and the team offering support. The leader's comments reflect this understanding:

*Teachers are at different stages along the continuum of readiness to move into some methodologies. It's about the teams and where people are at within the team and sharing good practice amongst the team to be clear about the expectations of the team and you are all responsible for each other's learning. So it means taking some people along a little bit further* (Interview 11)

Although interviewees were generally very positive about their school directions and PD opportunities, occasional comments were made about being more focused, ' *on just one or two things and narrow it down and become really good at that and then go and do something else'* (Interview 14). Similar comments are the need for 'more *time to bring professional development down to a level that we could actually put it into practice' (*Interview 12). Therefore, a significant issue for success in teacher learning is the developing of a collective vision and school goals are a significant influence on PD plans, although even in best practice schools, more time to fine-tune skills and develop and apply a deep understanding, is needed .

However, overall, interviewees were very positive about Southside's current focus on teacher learning teams and restructuring into learning communities. The leader's comments reflect the current change process and the ongoing links to whole school directions, the power of the collegial teacher teams and the focus on collecting data as evidence of improved student learning outcomes:

*So what that means is that there'd be some whole school stuff as well as teams. .. I guess with team planning, it's still really important that they're working to, you know a plan, and that they're fitting in with the school priorities. So what we sort of do is say, this is what we expect are the outcomes, you know like that's all in our partnerships plan. We've got outcomes, we've got performance targets so we make the performance targets clear to people. But at the end of the year these are the behaviours what we want to see in children's learning. You know it might be more on-task behaviour, it might be kids interacting positively with one another, those sorts of performance indicators. And then, in terms of collecting data about how effective the programs have been, we'd collect data from kids and from teachers. Um, but developing that concept of the learning team driving its own agenda, is something that we're really keen to do.* (Interview 11)

Finally, Southside's leadership and the commitment of staff to their learning are reflected in a teacher's comment that, "*I think about how lucky the kids are in this school...the teachers at this school are able to access such up-to-date training and are so committed* (Interview 14).

In summary, through a strong focus on professional development by the school leader, Southside staff are given financial support and opportunities for group attendance at conferences linked to the school improvement directions and teacher and student learning communities are beginning to be established.

**Discussion**

Restructuring the school day, developing collegial teams and the role of the leader in change, are key issues which emerge from the case studies involving interviews in three South Australian schools. The interview schools were enlightened case study sites, selected because of their strong commitment to teacher learning and Professional Development. These schools provide detailed information about some issues such as providing release time for team meetings and shortening the school day for professional development in general, and these aspects were previously highlighted in a report of an Internet survey of South Australian school leaders (Owen, 2002). In general, the fifteen interviewees in these three sites, value their current school's approach to professional development and believe that their professional learning is being supported.

Reflecting Kenway et al (1999) specifically, leadership advocacy and a dedicated time and budget are emphasised in the interview schools. The teachers highlighted the very important role of the principal in ensuring planned and focused whole school change. However, while acknowledging the school as a predominant source of PD, they also acknowledged the opportunity for other types of PD focused on themselves as individuals. They praised their leaders for supporting individual professional growth through encouraging individual attendance at leadership training programs, providing funding for courses and establishing a culture of sharing conference ideas with others. Therefore, in the interview schools, while the sites themselves and teams and faculties were obviously the most important focus for teacher professional development, reflecting the literature (Kenway et al, 1999), all the teachers also recognised the importance of external conference attendance to gain fresh ideas. This was especially successful when the school culture had been established with follow-up of conferences and sharing of information, with Hillside including an issues session of a range of topics being available in the meeting rotation, and conference participants sharing their experiences.

Therefore, common principles of effective professional development in the research literature (Kenway et al, 1999; Lewis, 2002; Garet et al, 2001; and Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995) are generally evident, and these may be linked to the interview schools. For example, school planning directions are generally driving the professional development agenda in the three schools. Nonetheless, there was caution noted by some of the interviewees about their schools remaining focused, providing adequate follow-up time to implement change and not taking on too many projects.

In addition, while some whole school PD processes were important to establish a common vision and effectively manage mandated system issues, in all the interview schools, it is in the teams and faculties where the strongest sense of evolving learning communities is evident in the three case studies. Again reflecting the literature (Kenway et al, 1999; Darling Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995; Garet et al 2001;and Lewis, 2002), the faculties and levels of schooling groups operate as self-directed teams, each having a common focus, dependent on the student age group or subject. This focus involves shared decision-making; valuing of group expertise; a focus on active learning including observing, planning, reviewing student work and problem-solving together. The group provides long term opportunities for professional development and professional growth.

There was particular excitement in the primary school groups about the restructuring of classes into teacher/student learning communities and the informal learning which arises from joint planning and ongoing opportunities for observation in open-space structural environments. Therefore, reflecting Kenway et al (1999), the collegial teaching teams involved plenty of risk-taking and experimentation but this is a feature of any learning experience. Learning communities, particularly where the challenging of traditional classroom structures of teacher isolation is involved, raise the potential for dysfunctional and unharmonious groups. Head (2003) provides further insight into the contested nature of collaboration and the importance of moving beyond its use as an organisational tool which is bounded within narrow confines. Similarly, Hargreaves (1992), in discussing this social phase, outlines teacher cultures of balkanisation, individualism, contrived collegiality and collaboration, with ways of relating having *'profound implications for their teaching in the classroom, how they evolve and develop as teachers*' (1992, p. 217). He indicates that the notion of communities of practice in schools may be romanticised and in reality may involve contrived collegiality for administrative and functional reasons. Contrived collegiality did not appear to be an issue in the case study schools, with interviewees generalising about the predominant satisfaction they felt, particularly in relation to PD in their current schools.

Despite the achievements of these schools, the need for careful planning of the team time was highlighted. Reflecting Kenway et al (1999) in particular, all the schools showed a strong commitment to providing more time for teacher learning and they have found creative approaches to maximizing existing staff meeting time for PD and ensuring additional release time for teams. This includes Hillside's shortened school day in the secondary school setting, Southside's team release time, and a restructuring of the existing staff meeting time by all the schools to reduce administrivia and increase professional discussion and collegial learning. Despite the success of the schools in creating additional teacher learning time, the Internet survey of South Australian school leaders indicated that these approaches are not commonplace, with staff meetings in whole school and teams being the most significant time for teacher professional development. Only 6% of secondary and area schools had shortened school days, and 9% of primary schools regularly release teachers in teams during the workday (Owen, 2002).

Therefore consistent with the literature (Kenway et al, 1999; Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995), while there are still further developments needed, the good practice principles in terms of school-based PD are beginning to emerge in the interview sample schools, through restructuring, reconceptualizing and the establishment of learning communities.

## Conclusion

This research was undertaken to explore in greater detail, aspects of teacher professional development which arose from the first research stage involving an Internet survey of South Australian school leaders (Owen, 2002). This current paper reports on the second research stage comprising the fifteen teacher interviews and the report focuses on the issues of creating time, collegial teams and the role of the leader in change. These three schools reflect the quality professional development principles from the research literature, and a particular highlight was the teacher/student learning communities in the

primary schools and the co-planning and co-teaching occurring, with their consequent impacts on teacher learning.

The third stage of the research involves interviews and various forms of research in other Australian states and overseas to identify emerging trends and to make recommendations to the South Australian education system regarding the opportunities for teacher learning in the future.

The stage 2 teacher interviews showed that the principles of effective school-based professional development are evident in the case study schools. The information provided here regarding South Australian schools highlights further details for schools which are seeking to revitalize their teacher learning communities through '*the power of collegiality'*.

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