

**DEVELOPING A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY FOR TEACHERS  
OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

Submitted by

Alexandra Katharina Harvey

Dip. Ed, B. Ed, Grad. Dip. Ed (RE), M. Ed (Leadership), M. Ed (RE).

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Education

School of Religious Education

Faculty of Education

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

Research Services  
Locked Bag 4115,  
Fitzroy, Victoria 3065  
Australia

December, 2009

### Statement of Sources

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in this thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees (where required).

Signed: 

Date: 22.2.2010

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am particularly grateful to the teachers in Tasmania, who so willingly participated in the research and allowed me the opportunity to share their professional learning journey. Over the past thirty years of teaching in seven Catholic schools across three States of Australia I have been blessed to work with educators, parents and students who have inspired this work.

I acknowledge my supervisors, Dr. Richard Rymarz for his initial encouragement and support as I began the research journey and to Dr. Kath Engebretson for her stimulating and challenging supervision. I am deeply appreciative of her advice and attention to detail. Without her support, feedback and encouragement this doctorate may never have been completed.

To my parents Karl-Heinz and Anneliese, they made sacrifices to allow me the privilege of being educated within the Catholic school system, and were the foundation of my ultimate vocation and work as a teacher.

Finally I extend my gratitude and dedicate this study to my husband Peter and daughter Kate who have journeyed these last few years with me. They have given me time and space to complete this work. I am forever grateful for their patience and support.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis, ‘Developing a professional learning community for teachers of religious education’, aimed to study the learning experiences of teachers involved in professional learning to implement new religious education guidelines.

In particular, the study attempted to explore teacher perceptions of the characteristics of effective professional learning and identified factors influencing their professional growth. Following the development of themes and key understandings, further research aimed to study the impact that teacher professional learning had on improving classroom instruction that in turn improved student learning outcomes.

Situated within a qualitative paradigm the research design for the study is that of symbolic interactionism. Grounded theory methodology was used to analyse the theory generated from the data which included surveys, guided conversations, and moderation of student work samples.

Themes generated from the study included Change and professional learning; The content of professional learning; The structure and design of professional learning in religious education; The context of professional learning in religious education; The reasons for professional learning in religious education; Professional learning that influenced teaching practices; and Professional learning that influenced student outcomes. From these themes, key understanding were developed and discussed against the research literature.

The study has the potential to inform educational leaders of effective characteristics of professional learning for teachers of religious education that promote teacher learning and improve student outcomes.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE	1
STATEMENT OF SOURCES	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	3
ABSTRACT	4
TABLE OF CONTENTS	5
ABBREVIATIONS	12
LIST OF TABLES	13
LIST OF FIGURES	14
CHAPTER ONE. BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH	16
Introduction	16
Definitions of two key terms used in this thesis	17
<i>Religious education</i>	17
<i>Professional learning</i>	18
Historical background of Catholic schools in Tasmania	19
Historical approaches to religious education in Tasmania	24
The new Tasmanian religious education guidelines	28
Dimensions of the Tasmanian religious education guidelines	30
<i>Doctrinal dimension</i>	30
<i>Catechetical dimension</i>	30
<i>Shared Christian Praxis, a definition</i>	31
<i>Components of a shared Christian praxis approach</i>	32
<i>Curriculum dimension</i>	36
<i>Pedagogical dimension</i>	38
Good News for Living, program implementation	39
Professional learning for religious education	40
Aims of the research	41
Conclusion	42

CHAPTER TWO. LITERATURE REVIEW	44
Introduction	44
Historical models of professional learning	46
<i>Introduction</i>	46
<i>The outside-in model of professional learning</i>	46
<i>The inside-in model of professional learning</i>	48
<i>Introduction</i>	48
<i>Learning together and reflective practice</i>	49
<i>Action research as an inside-in model</i>	50
<i>The inside/outside models of professional learning</i>	51
Influences on professional learning	54
<i>Introduction</i>	54
<i>Images of teacher learning</i>	55
<i>Teacher and educational change - Professional learning as a change process</i>	57
<i>School improvement and professional learning</i>	59
<i>Schools as professional learning communities</i>	60
<i>Research on teaching, learning and thinking</i>	61
<i>Higher standards for all students</i>	62
Design characteristics of effective professional learning	63
<i>Introduction</i>	63
<i>Professional learning must have students and their learning at the core</i>	65
<i>Testing and assessment</i>	65
<i>Curriculum content, teaching and learning</i>	67
<i>Professional learning should be site-based and involve teachers</i>	68
<i>Professional learning must take learning theories into consideration</i>	69
<i>Professional learning takes time</i>	70
<i>Professional learning needs active collaborative engagement that leads to reflective practice</i>	70
<i>Professional learning needs to be ongoing and supported</i>	72
<i>The content of professional learning must come from both research and practice using both inside and outside knowledge</i>	72
Articulation of a school-based professional learning model	74
Conclusion	76
CHAPTER THREE. THE RESEARCH DESIGN	78
Introduction	78
Theoretical paradigms	79

Epistemological Foundations	79
Theoretical Perspective	81
<i>Symbolic Interactionism</i>	81
Methodology	83
<i>Introduction</i>	83
<i>Grounded theory</i>	83
<i>Grounded theory used as the research methodology</i>	86
Methods	86
<i>Data collecting strategies</i>	86
<i>Data gathering</i>	89
<i>Questionnaire</i>	89
<i>Interviews</i>	92
<i>Structured interviews</i>	92
<i>Unstructured interviews</i>	93
<i>Collaborative assessment</i>	94
<i>Collaborative assessment conference.</i>	95
<i>Tuning protocol.</i>	95
<i>Classroom observation</i>	98
<i>Observer influence in classroom behaviour.</i>	100
How the research was conducted	100
<i>Participants</i>	100
<i>Accreditation</i>	103
<i>Participants</i>	103
<i>Conducting the research</i>	104
<i>Questionnaires</i>	105
<i>Structured interviews</i>	106
<i>Unstructured group interviews</i>	107
Conclusion	110
CHAPTER FOUR. ANALYSIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THEORY: PART ONE	111
Introduction	111
Theme One. Change and professional learning	112
<i>Introduction</i>	112
<i>The need to create a culture of learning</i>	113
<i>To sustain change, time is needed</i>	116
<i>The need to create a supportive environment</i>	118
<i>The need to create a sense of purpose</i>	120
<i>Summary of key understandings from theme one</i>	121
Theme two. The content of professional learning in religious education	122

<i>Introduction</i>	122
<i>Professional learning in religious education should be needs-based and include content knowledge of the unit to be taught</i>	123
<i>Professional learning in religious education needs to address the teaching skills of best practice</i>	125
<i>Professional learning in religious education needs to address relevant topics</i>	126
<i>Summary of key understandings from theme two</i>	128
Theme three. Structure of professional learning	129
<i>Introduction</i>	129
<i>Professional learning should include the principles of collaborative learning</i>	130
<i>Professional learning should use adult learning theories and principles</i>	132
<i>Professional learning should use protocols and professional language or dialogue</i>	134
<i>Summary of key understandings from theme three</i>	136
Theme four. Context of professional learning	137
<i>Introduction</i>	137
<i>Professional learning should be school based</i>	137
<i>Professional learning should be linked with outside professional organisations such as the Catholic Education Office and Universities</i>	139
<i>Summary of key understandings from theme four</i>	141
Theme five. Reasons for professional learning	141
<i>Introduction</i>	141
<i>Professional learning should be linked to improving student outcomes</i>	142
<i>Professional learning should be linked to school improvement</i>	144
<i>Summary of key understandings from theme five</i>	144
Conclusion	145
CHAPTER FIVE. ANALYSIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THEORY: PART TWO	147
Introduction	147
Theme one. Change and professional learning	148
<i>Introduction</i>	148
<i>Links to other changes – Transferring knowledge and skills across subject disciplines</i>	148
<i>Improvement means a change for the better</i>	151
<i>The need to sustain change/change needs time</i>	152
<i>Climate – why are we doing this? A sense of purpose</i>	152



<i>Summary of key understandings from theme one</i>	153
Theme two. The content of professional learning	154
<i>Introduction</i>	154
<i>Professional learning needs to include supportive texts and classroom resources</i>	155
<i>Professional learning in religious education should include theology, Scripture and spirituality</i>	156
<i>Summary of key understandings from theme two</i>	159
Theme three. Structure of professional learning	160
<i>Introduction</i>	160
<i>Professional learning should include the principles of collaborative learning</i>	161
<i>Professional learning should use adult learning theories and principles</i>	162
<i>Professional learning should use protocols and professional language or dialogue</i>	163
<i>Professional learning should be ongoing and supported</i>	166
<i>Professional learning should be presented by someone who is able to support staff in a credible and organised manner</i>	167
<i>Summary of key understandings from theme three</i>	167
Theme four. Context of the professional learning	168
<i>Introduction</i>	168
<i>Professional learning in religious education should be linked to the parish community</i>	169
<i>Summary of key understandings from theme four</i>	170
Theme five. Reasons for professional learning	171
<i>Introduction</i>	171
<i>Professional learning should be linked to student outcomes</i>	172
<i>Professional learning should be concerned with improving teaching</i>	177
<i>Professional learning should be linked to school improvement</i>	178
<i>Summary of key understandings from theme five</i>	178
Theme six. Professional learning that influenced teaching practice	179
<i>Introduction</i>	179
<i>Professional learning that included follow up and support</i>	180
<i>Professional learning that included accountability and collaborative practices</i>	181
<i>Professional learning that was identified by the group and was flexible</i>	182
<i>Summary of key understandings from theme six</i>	183

Theme seven. Professional learning that influenced student outcomes	184
<i>Introduction</i>	184
<i>Professional learning that improved teaching</i>	184
<i>Summary of key understandings from theme seven</i>	186
Conclusion	186
CHAPTER SIX. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	190
Introduction	190
Characteristics of effective professional learning in religious education	190
<i>Introduction</i>	190
<i>The structure of professional learning</i>	191
<i>Context of professional learning</i>	193
<i>Presenters of professional learning</i>	194
Professional learning perceived as influencing the growth of teachers of religious education	194
<i>Introduction</i>	194
<i>The structure</i>	195
<i>The content</i>	196
<i>The presenter</i>	197
Religious education professional learning activities that changed teacher behaviour and influenced student learning	197
Summary of theory generated	199
Recommendations from the research questions	200
<i>Responsibility for religious education</i>	200
<i>Change process</i>	201
<i>Content of professional learning</i>	201
<i>Structure of professional learning</i>	202
<i>Context of professional learning</i>	203
<i>Reasons for participating in professional learning</i>	203
<i>Role of the presenters of professional learning in religious education</i>	203
Significance and limitations of the research	204
Recommendations for further research	205
Conclusion	207
REFERENCES	210

APPENDICES	225
Appendix 1 Letter of consent from the Director, CEO	225
Appendix 2 Ethics Approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee	226
Appendix 3A Teacher Questionnaire	227
Appendix 3B Teacher Questionnaire	229
Appendix 4 Structured Interview Questions	231
Appendix 5A Flanders interaction analysis categories (FIAC)	232
Appendix 5B Classroom observation	233
Appendix 5C Classroom observation	234
Appendix 6 Consent form (ACU)	235

## ABBREVIATIONS

### A

ACER	Australian Council of Educational research
ACU	Australian Catholic University
APRE	Assistant Principal Religious Education

### C

CC	Congregation for the Clergy
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CCE	Congregation for Catholic education
CEO	Catholic Education Office

### E

ELF	Essential learning Framework (Tasmanian Curriculum framework)
-----	---

### G

GDC	General Directory for Catechesis
GNL	Good News for Living

### N

NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
--------	---

### P

PD	Professional Development
----	--------------------------

### R

RDECS	The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School
RE	Religious Education
REC	Religious Education Coordinator
REF	Renewal of the Education of Faith

### S

SCCE	Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education
------	--

### U

UTAS	University of Tasmania
------	------------------------

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1	Movements in Groome's Shared Christian Praxis	34
Table 3.1	Overview of the research design	79
Table 3.2	Participant areas of responsibility	101
Table 3.3	Teaching experience of participants	102
Table 3.4	Teaching qualifications of participants	103
Table 3.5	Accreditation to teach religious education	103
Table 3.6	Age ranges of participants	104
Table 3.7	Phase one, unstructured group interviews	107
Table 3.8	Phase two, unstructured interviews	108
Table 3.9	Reflecting on the collaborative process	109
Table 3.10	Gap analysis (Tallerico, 2005)	110
Table 4.1	Themes and key understandings from chapter four	145
Table 5.1	Summary of themes and key understandings from the data	188
Table 6.1	Theory generated from the study	199

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1	Four dimensions of Religious Education (GNL)	29
Figure 2.1	Literature Review Framework	45
Figure 2.2	Outside-in professional learning model (Hoban, 1997)	47
Figure 2.3	Inside-in professional learning model (Hoban, 1997)	48
Figure 2.4	Inside/outside professional learning model (Hoban, 1997)	52
Figure 2.5	Model of professional learning theory (Supovitz, 2001)	73
Figure 2.6	Model of school-based professional learning to be implemented	75
Figure 3.1	Phases of grounded theory	85
Figure 3.2	Data gathering process	88
Figure 3.3	Triangulation process	89
Figure 3.4	Example of questionnaire	91
Figure 3.5	Example of emotions explored in the questionnaire	91
Figure 3.6	Processes used for looking at student work	97
Figure 3.7	FIAC (Hook, 1981). Pupil talk	99
Figure 3.8	Teacher question response sheet	99
Figure 3.9	Phases and time of data collection	105
Figure 3.10	Example of data generated from a structured interview	107
Figure 4.1	Theme one. Change and professional learning	113
Figure 4.2	Theme two. The content of professional learning in religious education	123
Figure 4.3	Theme three. The structure and design of professional learning	130
Figure 4.4	Theme four. The context of professional learning in religious education	137
Figure 4.5	Theme five. Reasons for professional learning	142

Figure 5.1	Theme one. Change and professional learning	148
Figure 5.2	Theme two. The content of professional learning in religious education	155
Figure 5.3	Theme three. The structure and design of professional learning	161
Figure 5.4	Theme four. The context of professional learning in religious education	169
Figure 5.5	Theme five. Reasons for professional learning in religious education	172
Figure 5.6	Theme six. Professional learning that influenced teaching practices	180
Figure 5.7	Theme seven. Professional learning that influenced student outcomes	184

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH**

#### Introduction

A review of religious education literature in Australia over the last two decades shows that there has been a development of diocesan guidelines, student texts, in-services and opportunities for teachers to undertake higher degrees in religious education. It was anticipated that these developments would lead to improvement in the quality of teaching and learning in religious education. However, current literature indicates that research and evaluations have largely focussed on the curriculum and its content (Engebretson, 2002; Engebretson & Rymarz, 2005; English, 2002; Hackett, 1995; Rymarz, 1999; White, 2004). In fact little research or commentary is available that draws direct links between professional learning of teachers of religious education and the impact that this has on improving the quality of teaching or learning and, therefore, improving student outcomes. The research project described in this thesis explored the connections between professional learning, improved classroom instruction and improved student learning in religious education in the primary school.

In 2005, the Catholic archdiocese of Hobart in Australia implemented new religious education guidelines within its thirty-seven schools. With this implementation, there was an opportunity to research and evaluate ‘best practice’ models and frameworks of professional learning for teachers of religious education and to assess the impact that this ‘new’ learning for teachers may have on outcomes for students in a particular school community. The school community at the centre of this research was a Catholic school in an urban area within the archdiocese of Hobart, the school in which the researcher is currently Principal. The study detailed in this thesis, therefore, was a work-embedded research project.



## Definitions of Two Key Terms Used in this Thesis

### *Religious Education*

Religious education within the Catholic context is a form of ‘ministry of the Word’ (Holohan, 1999); It is considered an activity of evangelisation. Therefore, the purpose of religious education is presented as ‘handing on’ the Christian faith. *The General Directory for Catechesis* (Congregation for the Clergy, [CC], 1998, 73) stated that religious education “makes the Gospel present in a personal process of cultural, systemic and critical assimilation.” Similarly, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (Congregation for Catholic Education, [CCE], 1988, 81) described the process as, “revealing all human culture to the Good News of salvation so that the light of faith will illumine everything that the students will gradually come to learn about the world, life, and about the human person.”

Australian academics, Rossiter (1981, 1985, 1988) and Ryan (1990, 1997a, 1998), have argued for a less confessional definition so that religious education is not reduced to Church matters or maintenance of a Church Community. They argued for a more educational approach to religious education and considered the formal religious education classroom as the appropriate place for the study of religious education (Buchanan, 2008). Furthermore, Rossiter (1981) emphasised that the study of religious education as an academic discipline has the potential to act as a channel to personal and communal formation in faith. The new Tasmanian archdiocesan guidelines, titled ‘Good News for Living’ (GNL, 2005), used by participants within this study, defined religious education as:

Making accessible knowledge of the traditions of a particular religion, in this instance the Catholic faith tradition. Engaging in learning and teaching processes which aim to inform, form and transform the individual and society. (GNL, p. 129).

For the purpose of this study, the definition of religious education refers to the formal classroom teaching process, the ‘lesson’ that is undertaken in a classroom.

### *Professional Learning*

Professional learning refers to the process of ongoing teacher education. Elsewhere it is referred to as professional development, staff development and in-service (Buchler & Buller, 1998; Corcoran, 1995; Joyce & Showers, 2002). The researcher acknowledges that the ongoing process of teacher education in religious education is influenced by a diversity of implicit and explicit factors. Within the school environment these factors include the impact of a school’s culture, liturgies, prayer, reflections and retreat opportunities, teaching and sacramental programs, particular religious charisms, pastoral care and the integration of the school’s Catholic values. These factors may contribute to the nurturing, spiritual awareness and overall religious development of a teacher. Whilst acknowledging the interactions of both the implicit and explicit aspects of any religious program within a school, and the impact that these programs may have on the development of a teacher’s professional learning in religious education, this research project specifically referred to the explicit process of professional learning, that is, the professional learning that was targeted within the school’s teaching and learning program. The most common activities included in a school’s professional learning are internal and external workshops, staff development and in-service activities, in addition to teacher programming and planning. The aim of professional learning within the context of the study included the need for teachers to ‘change’, to implement new religious education guidelines. The terms ‘professional growth’ and ‘change’ can be used interchangeably and are seen as a product of professional learning.

## Historical Background of Catholic Schools in Tasmania

Overall, little commentary is available on the history of Catholic schooling and religious education in Catholic schools in Tasmania. Church historian Fr. Terry Southerwood (1983, 1989) focused on the development of parishes and the clergy within them. Brady's (2005) thesis on the Sisters of St. Joseph and their involvement in Catholic education provided some information, in particular on the schools that were founded by the Sisters between 1887 and 1937. Fox (2006) provided information on the history of the Presentation Sisters in Tasmania between 1866 and 2006.

Evidence from Brady (2005) indicated that four Catholic schools existed in Tasmania in 1848 with 315 pupils. Fox (2006) and McCormack (1988) indicated that formal Catholic secondary schools were established in Hobart in the early 1860's and Launceston in the 1870's. Although little information is available on Tasmanian Catholic schools before this time, anecdotal evidence<sup>1</sup> suggested that Tasmanian schools would have operated on a similar basis to their counterparts in other states of Australia. Other researchers and writers (O'Farrell, 1969, 1985; Ryan, 1990, 1997a, 1997b, 2007; Welbourne, 1997) have indicated that these colonial schools were under the guidance of the local Catholic parish priest and were usually staffed by a Catholic lay person who possessed some basic teacher training, until they were taken over by the religious orders. Religious traditions were passed from one generation to the next and the purpose of schools and Churches was to ensure that the cultural norms were conserved and the 'faith was passed on'. The authority of the Church was seen as the basis for the content of faith and rituals and prayers were learnt. During this time, the cooperation between the Churches and the colonial government ensured that Catholic schools were financed (O'Farrell, 1969; Ryan, 2007).

---

<sup>1</sup> Anecdotal evidence was gained from conversations, discussions and interviews with Catholic Education Office staff, teaching staff employed within the Catholic education system and local parish priests.

In the period between 1865 and 1900 much debate occurred in the colonies over the provision of education. Various education boards were established in states and the question of Government financial assistance, a national curriculum and religious instruction in Catholic schools, featured prominently in the debate. In 1862, the Provincial Council attended by the Bishops of Hobart, Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney denounced a 'National Education' system for the colony, believing that the secular system was devoid of any moral virtue and advised parents to, 'proclaim, publicly and politically, their determination to retain religious education' (O'Farrell, 1969; Ryan, 2007). The literature (O'Farrell, 1969; Ryan, 2007; Ryan & Malone, 1996) further indicated that the Catholic community wanted Catholic school children 'protected' from the government's secular system and were eager to maintain a separate identity for Catholic schools, to ensure that religious instruction was provided in accordance with Catholic teachings. Attendance at government schools was believed to be a threat to the future of the Catholic Church in Australia. In addition to teaching religious education, these Catholic schools offered their students a secular curriculum, which mirrored the curriculum provided by government schools. This pattern of education still exists in Catholic schools today, although funding arrangements have changed a great deal.

In 1868 the Public Schools Bill was passed and Tasmania became the first colony in the British Empire to introduce compulsory education (Brady, 2005). This meant that education became compulsory for students aged between 7 to 12 years. State aid to denominational schools ended in 1854 and, as the number of Catholics and Catholic schools increased during this time, controversy soon arose (Barcan, 1980). Without the government's financial assistance to Catholic schools, funding, as well as the ability to find qualified teaching staff was a constant challenge. The *Catholic Standard*<sup>2</sup>, under direction from Bishop Murphy called for schools to be reserved for Catholic children. To support the Catholic

---

<sup>2</sup> *The Catholic Standard* was the local Tasmanian Catholic newspaper. This paper was published monthly.

schools, Catholic parishioners undertook constant fund-raising, lay teachers worked for lower wages and recruiting efforts for religious staff increased. At the beginning of the twentieth century the members of religious congregations exceeded the number of lay people working and teaching in Catholic schools (O'Donoghue & Burley, 2008; O'Farrell, 1969).

Within the archdiocese of Hobart, Catholic schools developed in the same way as their counterparts in other states, under the guidance of parish priests and religious congregations. Although often poorly resourced, these schools enjoyed autonomy and a freedom from a centralised, Church authority (Ryan & Malone, 1996). They were founded on the belief of the relationship between religion and life, and “aimed to foster an atmosphere in which the symbols and imagery of Catholicism would be obvious and permeating” (Ryan & Malone, 1996, p. 35) .

Several amended Education Acts followed the 1868 Public School Bill, and these Acts attempted to address the issue of making education compulsory, free and secular. The 1886 Act ended non-denominational religious instruction by the teacher, but clergy were still able to continue instruction. All children were required to pay to attend school, whether they were in state or non-state schools. Fees charged ranged from 6d to 9d per week (Brady, 2005).

From the 1860's the promotion of Catholic education and Catholic schools became a major issue for the Tasmanian Catholic Church.

Bishop Daniel Murphy of Hobart in his 1874 pastoral letter quotes from the Decree concerning education published by the Second Provincial Council of Australia, calling for the removal of Catholic youth from public schools and for the erection of more Catholic schools (Brady, 2005, p. 59).

Along with his counterparts, Bishop Murphy was unyielding, reminding his priests of their power to deny the sacraments both to children who attended non-Catholic schools and to their parents and guardians. Families were left with the decision to provide children with Catholic schooling or face excommunication (Brady, 2005).

The Education Acts from 1905 placed further strains on Catholic schools. Schools were required to keep proper statistics and be open for health inspections by local authorities, and all teachers were required to be registered. This meant that schools had to meet the required standards and new buildings were to be constructed to the standards required by the state government. Schemes would also be needed for supplying teacher registration. In 1907 the number of non-State schools in Tasmania had decreased from 204 in 1906 to 156 (Brady, 2005). In an effort to ensure that Catholic schools were complying with educational standards and regulations, inspectors were appointed by the Education Department. In addition to the state education department's inspections, the Tasmanian Catholic Church adopted an inspection of its schools under the guidance of Coadjutor Bishop Dr. Patrick Delany (1853-1926). Delany used the school visits to, “ both inspect the schools and also to challenge the parents into meeting their legal responsibilities” (Brady, 2005, p. 148).

Examination of the school at Devonport started at 10am with Grade distributed prizes. He was surprised at how well the Protestant children replied. He had discovered the reason, for the Protestant children had done uniformly better than the Catholics because they attended school regularly. The Bishop continued to say that if parents under the cover of giving their children a Catholic education were evading the law and neglecting their obligations towards their children, he might find it necessary to exhibit the school register to the proper authorities at the close of the school year so that the state could deal with such parties as they observed.

*(The Monitor, May 19, 1984 as cited in Brady, 2005, p. 148).*

Although Delany continued to campaign for free education for all schools and state aid to Catholic schools, the fight for government remuneration was unsuccessful. Catholic schools were forced to continue to raise money by whatever means possible and fund-raising efforts became common. During the period 1918-1937, although no major educational legislation was passed, changing economic and social conditions caused by the depression led to the struggle for the survival of the Catholic school system in Tasmania. No new schools were built between 1906 and 1922 but a total reconstruction of the country Catholic schools

occurred between 1920 and the 1930's (Brady, 2005). The costs of these projects were once again met by local fund-raising efforts.

Major financial challenges continued to have an impact on Catholic schools, and Catholic communities continued various political campaigns throughout the 1950s to once again attract Government funding to their schools. The 'Goulburn' school strike of 1962 was a marker in the shift of government attitude towards the funding of non-government schools and following the strike, both State and Commonwealth governments made provisions to assist non government schools. In addition to securing Commonwealth funding, the 1967 Education Bill ensured state aid to independent schools in Tasmania (Southerwood, 1983; 1989). The provision of funding to the Catholic system of schools saw the development of centralised bureaucracies. State and National Catholic Education Commissions were formed, with the first Tasmanian Commission convening on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1978. Catholic Education Offices flourished across the country with the Hobart Office first convening under the Direction of Archbishop Guilford Young and Fr. James Doolan in 1961<sup>3</sup>. The development of these offices in Australia had a great impact on Catholic schools, which changed from being a relatively autonomous, loose network of schools under the direction of the local parish priest and the religious congregations, into a system of schools (Ryan & Malone, 1996). Among the responsibilities of these offices was support for schools' efforts in religious education. This was particularly helpful during a time when there were less Religious staff members teaching in schools. Consultants were appointed to advise and support the schools in their religious education programs on behalf of the Bishops.

Today, the Hobart Catholic Education Office (CEO) provides advice and support to schools. The Archbishop has appointed Governing Councils to deal with any issues relating to school governance. In addition to this, he appoints the Director of Catholic Education,

---

<sup>3</sup> This information was obtained from Tasmanian Catholic Church archivist Sr. Carmel Hall.

who, in turn, appoints various other personnel within the CEO. A Director of Faith Services has been appointed and a number of consultants and staff work together within the team of *Religious Education and Faith Services* to provide services, advice and support to the thirty-seven schools within the archdiocese. One key feature of this support and advice includes religious education.

### Historical Approaches to Religious Education in Tasmania

The approach to the teaching and learning of religious education in Catholic schools changed very little from the beginning of Catholic schooling in the colony until the early 1960's (Buchanan, 2003, 2007; Ryan, 1990, 1997a, 2007). The authority of the Church was seen as the basis for the content of faith, and the religion curriculum of the Catholic school revolved around the Catechism, which was originally based on either the Irish or French versions. The catechism was a small compendium of theological concepts, focusing on revealed truth, which was taught and accepted. The doctrines and morals it contained were to be believed and practised by all Catholics as it was considered to be the authority on Church teachings. It was expected that students would memorise these teachings (Brady, 2005; Ryan, 2007). The systematic question and answer format allowed for the examination of the basic doctrines of the Church. Prayers and practices of the Catholic tradition, which children learned and used when participating in worship were also included in the religious education class (Ryan, 2007).

At the first Plenary Council of Australasian bishops in 1885, the bishops adopted a catechism based on the 'Irish Maynooth Catechism'. This catechism was mandatory and used by most Catholic primary schools in the colonies for nearly eighty years. The catechism was known as either the 'penny' or 'green catechism.' Given that the catechism was the most common source of instruction for all young Catholics at this time, it has been called, "the



most influential document in Australian Catholic history” (Ryan, 2007, p. 46). It was assumed that most students and families attended Mass regularly and, therefore, classroom teaching was directed towards improving a student’s devotional life (Hyde & Rymarz, 2009).

Religious education in Tasmania in the 1930’s was also influenced by a more modern educational method of teaching Christian doctrine. Fathers Francis Kent, Vincent Green, John Lynch and John Cullen led this movement. Their approach was to move from rote learning to an understanding of the truths of the faith with emphasis placed on the Bible, Church History and lived Christianity (Brady, 2005). This was a significant change from the approach of the Catechism as it focused on understanding as opposed to memory. This approach also led to the introduction of Christian Doctrine examinations in the 1930’s by Fr. P.J. Lynch who was appointed Diocesan examiner in Christian Doctrine. In 1931 a syllabus for the teaching of religion for both primary and secondary students was published and annual examinations were instituted from that year (Brady, 2005). Brady noted that it is difficult to determine the success of this approach as no reports are available, however her research concluded that the Sisters who were implementing the changes recalled that the change in direction for Religious Education “was a positive enhancement of the teaching of religion” (Brady, 2005, p. 201).

There is no evidence of the religious education syllabus or materials used by Tasmanian schools systematically from the late 1930’s to 1960’s. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some schools were again using the catechism.<sup>4</sup> Shifts in the catechetical process of religious education in Australia began in the early 1960’s with the development of the Kerygmatic Movement. The Kerygmatic Movement placed emphasis on the proclamation of the Word. It was an approach to religious education that assumed students were active members of a faith community (Hyde & Rymarz, 2009). The Australian Catholic Bishops

---

<sup>4</sup> Anecdotal evidence includes discussions with attendees of Catholic schools in Tasmania during the 1950’s. Their recollection includes learning the ‘questions and answers’ from the catechism.

mandated the use of the primary kerygmatic texts titled, *My Way To God*, as the religion program to be used in all Catholic schools (Ryan, 2007). It was the last time a national binding mandate for the use of texts would occur in the Catholic Church in Australia. The Kerygmatic approach, “took account of contemporary theories of classroom teaching and learning which argued for a more active approach” (Ryan & Malone, 1996, p.40). It also invited students to, “find their way to God, by learning Bible stories, singing, praying and dancing the traditions of the Church” (Ryan & Malone, 1996, p. 40). It introduced new content and approaches to the religion classroom. The proclamation of the Good News became an integral part of religious education (Hyde & Rymarz, 2009). “A key part of this proclamation was scripture” (Hyde & Rymarz, 2009, p. 5). Unfortunately many teachers were unprepared to implement this new approach, lacking the knowledge and skills of Scripture and Church history that were required (Ryan, 2007).

The 1960’s were a time of accelerated change, and the implementation of the Kerygmatic Renewal was soon overtaken by events leading to a change in Church life. The most notable of these events was the Second Vatican Council (1962 – 1965). The Council provided new insights on theology and Revelation and with the Church’s willingness to develop and renew, it set the scene for changes to religious education in schools (Ryan, 2007).

By the 1970’s, in response to new social movements and in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, a new catechetical, experiential, life-centred approach was established in religious education. Catholic Education Offices were also becoming prominent in Australian dioceses and their role in managing Catholic education was extended to managing religious education. The task of the religious education teacher in the 1970’s was to provide opportunities for students to recognise and experience God’s presence in their lives. Religious education was essentially a search for meaning and relevance for students, through

reflecting on their life experiences. Religion classes relied on teachers being people of faith, who were ready to share their faith with others. This included creating classroom environments that included celebrations, sharing of personal experiences, prayer, and ritual. The lack of theological substance and knowledge was evident in this approach, and this issue still drives the discussion today on the purpose and meaning of religious education (Buchanan, 2007; Healy, Hyde, & Rymarz, 2004; Rossiter, 1999). That is, should religious education emphasise knowledge and understanding or should it be concerned with nurturing faith and enculturating participants into a way of life?

The Melbourne Catholic Education Office developed new religious education guidelines in the early 1970s based on this new life-centred approach. These guidelines were curriculum documents produced by staff members. The guidelines outlined the experiential approach and provided teachers with statements about the teaching process, classroom strategies, and learning activities. Using the insights of Amalorpavadass (1973) the approach developed a 'four point plan' including: Experience Shared; Reflection Deepened; Faith Expressed; and, Insights Reinforced. Amalorpavadass advocated for a catechetical process that drew both from theology and human sciences (Buchanan, 2007; Engebretson, 1997; Ryan & Malone, 1996). Church support for the use of this catechetical approach was gained following the publication of two influential documents: *The Renewal of the Education of Faith*, (REF), a translation of a statement issued by the Italian Episcopal Conference, adapted for local conditions in 1970 by the Australian Bishops, and the *General Directory of Catechesis* (GDC), released in 1997. During this time, the Tasmanian Catholic Education Office remained a relatively small entity and with the increasing number of lay teachers recruited to teach in Catholic schools, teachers in all systemic Catholic schools were instructed to use the Melbourne guidelines as the basis of their religious education programs.

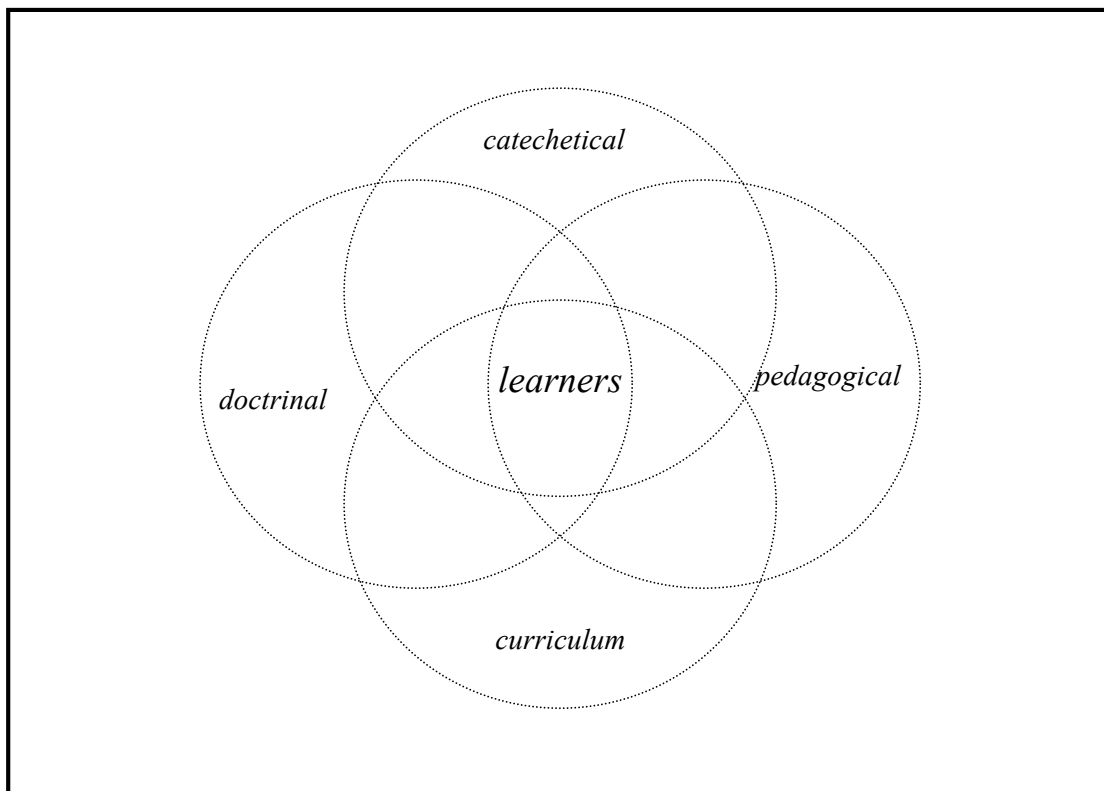
By the 1980's there was a growing awareness that religious education was a discipline in its own right, which was linked with other disciplines such as theology and Scripture. The new focus on the nature of religious education created challenges and brought significant changes in its content and methodology (Liddy & Welbourne, 1999; Ryan & Malone, 1996). An influential model of catechesis that appeared at this time was Groome's (1980, 1991) *Shared Christian Praxis*, which is commonly referred to as the praxis approach.

In 1995 the Melbourne archdiocese rewrote its own religious education guidelines and, again, the Tasmanian Catholic Education system adopted the new Melbourne guidelines as a curriculum guide for its schools. These new guidelines changed very little in terms of processes and outcomes. They relied on the experiential approach to teaching and the anticipated student outcome was to be education in faith. Ultimately, these religious education guidelines were superseded in the archdiocese of Melbourne with a new series of textbooks.

### The New Tasmanian Religious Education Guidelines

It is against this historical background that in 2003, when the Melbourne guidelines were no longer available, the archdiocese of Hobart, in collaboration with three Victorian dioceses, Sale, Sandhurst and Ballarat, decided to write a 'new' set of guidelines for their respective dioceses. Various personnel from the Catholic Education Offices, schools and parishes collaborated in the writing process of developing new religious education guidelines. Each diocese has since added its own flavour and resources to the developed units. In developing the new guidelines the writers were influenced by other texts and guidelines that have been published in various Australian states. In particular, the writers were influenced by *Sharing Our Story* (Diocese of Parramatta, 1991). This was used as the foundational document. The Tasmanian archdiocese launched its guidelines in 2005, titled, 'Good News

for Living' (GNL). The Core syllabus document outlines the religious formation process that schools and teachers are to use to program and plan their religious education. This process includes the four dimensions that are to underpin religious education: the doctrinal dimension; the catechetical dimension; the pedagogical dimension; and the curriculum dimension. The four dimensions are to be interpreted as interwoven concepts and are expressed in Figure 1.1.



*Figure 1.1. Four Dimensions of Religious Education (Good News for Living, 2006, p.59).*

The learning and teaching framework of the core document seeks to blend together and integrate the four dimensions that underpin religious education and it is anticipated that all four perspectives will provide an integrated approach that will be reflected in the teaching and learning of religious education. In an effort to understand the religious formation process as outlined in GNL, the four dimensions are further explored.

## Dimensions of the Tasmanian Religious Education Guidelines

### *Doctrinal Dimension*

This dimension is drawn from the faith tradition of the Catholic Church and reflects the essential learning in religious education. The main source of the doctrinal dimension is Scripture and the Catechism of the Catholic Church ([CCE], 1994). GNL states that the values and purposes are:

...based on the Gospel, reflect the hierarchy of truths within the Tradition, and incorporate the values and purposes discerned through community consultation in Tasmania and identified in the Essential Learnings Framework (ELF 1, 2002, pp. 8 & 9; *GNL*, 2006, p. 60).

Within the document, enduring understandings from the Catholic faith tradition have been developed and organised into eight strands.

Within each strand, specific doctrinal concepts are arranged sequentially. Together with the identified statements of values and purposes, these core strand statements guide planning for religious education (*GNL*, 2006, p. 62).

This section of the document provides the content for the religious education program. The strands include: Church, Christian Prayer, Religion and Society, Scripture, Christian Life, Sacraments, God and Jesus Christ.

### *Catechetical Dimension*

The catechetical dimension in its broadest context, aims to support teachers to develop a religious education program that will conserve the teachings, practices, and traditions of the Catholic Church. In particular, the catechetical process outlined in GNL to guide teacher planning, is based on Groome's Shared Christian Praxis model (1980; 1991). This model reflects the process used in developing the Parramatta guidelines, '*Sharing Our Story*' which was the foundational document used by the curriculum writers in developing the guidelines (GNL). Groome's Shared Christian Praxis model has had a significant influence

on the teaching models and approaches used by Australian religious educators since the 1980's (Bezzina, 1997; Ryan, 2007). The writers of curriculum guidelines and religious texts in many states of Australia, including Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, the Northern Territory, Australian Capital Territory and New South Wales, in addition to the authors of the text series, *Story Makers* (Koszarycz, 1993) and *Growing Together in Faith* (MacDonald, 1993), have acknowledged the significant influence of Groome's praxis approach to their work. Lovat, (1989; 2002) claimed that Groome's Shared Christian Praxis is, "by far the most admirable faith forming religious education model available today because of its educational and theological precisions" (Lovat, 1989, p. 36).

Groome's, *Christian Religious Education* (1980) provided the foundational and philosophical basis for a methodology that he called 'Shared Christian Praxis', aimed at critical consciousness and intentionality in religious education. In *Sharing Faith* (1991) Groome elaborated on Shared Christian Praxis and presented it as an approach not only for religious education, but also as an approach for other functions of pastoral ministry. Shared Christian Praxis is the core catechetical element of GNL and so further exploration of the model is required.

#### *'Shared Christian Praxis,' a Definition*

'Praxis' is a Greek word whose English translation is 'practice,' although Groome has stated that he does not believe it is an adequate translation. 'Practice' is usually seen as putting theory into practice, however, Groome has argued that instead of theory leading to practice, theory becomes or is seen as the reflective moment in praxis and articulated theory arises from that praxis to yield further praxis (1980, p. 152). The Shared Christian Praxis approach is based on the emancipatory way of knowing, it develops critical knowledge, and it

sets this way of knowing into a religious education methodology. This theory and method draws on the work of critical theorists, Habermas (1972, 1979) and Freire (1972, 1973).

Shared Christian Praxis is an action-reflection model whose intention is action for change. It looks to balance past knowledge and present experience and holds the past, present and future in a fruitful tension. Groome (1980) claimed that a memory of the rituals, symbols and texts of the past tradition of a Christian people must be critically remembered and constantly made present, recreated and developed, in and by present experience, to cause it to look forward to and be creative of the future. By using a methodology built on ‘present dialectical hermeneutics’, Groome claimed that a balance could be achieved between the past knowledge of the tradition and present experience. “Thus praxis can be viewed and pedagogically engaged from three perspectives: it has active, reflective and creative aspects” (1991, p. 136).

### *Components of a Shared Christian Praxis Approach*

According to Groome, Shared Christian Praxis takes place in a situation or group dialogue. “Shared in the dialogue is an articulation of critical reflection upon ones present active engagement in the world as a Christian” (Groome, 1980, p. 184). The critical reflection on one’s own story and vision takes place in light of the Christian communities’ story and its vision. It is hoped that in the end the group moves to further Christian praxis that is faithful to the story and creative of its vision.

Groome saw praxis as an approach to education in Christian faith that can be enacted by a focusing activity followed by five movements. The movements, as outlined in *Sharing Faith* (1991, pp. 146-148), are a refinement of his work in *Christian Religious Education* (1980, pp. 184-201). These five movements include: a) naming/expressing present praxis, b) critical reflection on present praxis, c) making accessible the Christian story and vision, d)



dialectical hermeneutics to appropriate the Christian story/vision to participants' stories and visions and e) decisions/responses for lived Christian faith.

Groome used the word 'movement', intentionally. He intended it to be a 'free flowing' process and compared it with movements in a dance or a piece of music (1991, p.146). The movements of shared Christian praxis should not be seen as a series of separate steps, since they might occur within the one lesson or over a series of lessons in the study of a unit. While a particular lesson or strategy might focus on one movement the others will be operative, in a process that supports the learners for deeper meaning. Teachers are encouraged to explore and use a range of teaching strategies within each movement and to select learning experiences from a variety of different sources.

The five movements of Shared Christian Praxis are shown in Table 1:1.

*Table 1:1. Movements in Groome's Shared Christian Praxis*

*1. Naming/expressing the present action – 'praxis'.*

In the first movement the participants of the group are invited to name or express in some form, their own or others' life experience that relates to a particular focus/ theme of their Christian faith/life.

*2. Critical reflection on present action*

The group participants are encouraged to reflect on what has already been expressed. The activity includes: critical reason to evaluate the present, critical memory to uncover the past in the present and creative imagination to envision the future in the present. This involves asking why questions: Why do we do this? Why do others act the way they do? What options are there? It enables the participants to come to a critical understanding of present praxis in their own place and time and to share in their own stories and visions.

*3. Making the Christian community story and vision accessible*

As part of the third movement the group participants are given access to the community's story. The story of the faith life of the community as expressed through Scripture, Church traditions, and liturgies as they are relevant to the focusing theme and/or topic is brought to bear on the reflection of the previous movement.

*4. Dialectical hermeneutic between the Christian story and the story of the participants*

In movement four, participants reflect on their own understandings, experiences, views and questions in the light of the Christian story and vision; by placing the two in relationship, they deepen their own understanding. As part of this movement, participants ask, how does this story/vision question and call us beyond present praxis?

*5. Decision/response for lived Christian faith – A decision for future action*

In movement five, participants are challenged to decide upon a future action that will help close the gap between the lived experience and the Christian story, that is, to make decisions about how to live the Christian faith in the world.

The Christian Story and Vision as outlined by Groome is more than just Biblical stories. It is the faith story of the Christian community throughout history and in the present, expressed through Scripture and the Tradition of the Church in its teachings, prayer, worship,

communal life and mission involving the lives of the faithful Christian people throughout the ages.

One of the foundational principles of Groome's approach is that the outcomes for religious education are more than cognitive. He argued for a holistic approach to religious education:

I have been convinced for some time that the learning outcome of Christian religious education should be more than what the Western world typically means by 'knowledge', that it is to engage the 'whole being' of people, their heads, hearts and life-styles, and is to inform, form and transform their identity and agency in the world (Groome, 1991, p. 2).

Despite this widespread influence across Australia, some of the foremost religious education writers and academics Malone & Ryan (1996), Lovat (1989) & Rossiter (1981, 1986, 1987) have been critical of the praxis approach, stating that it is not an appropriate approach for religious education in Australian Catholic classrooms. The assumptions and expectations that underpin a faith-forming approach such as Groome's Shared Christian Praxis, is that teachers and students are willing and able to participate in faith discussions and to engage in Christian faith formation, with the aim of building up the life and faith of a particular Christian group. Malone & Ryan (1996) noted that students participating in Australian religious education classrooms do not always share the Catholic faith tradition. Increasingly, schools and classrooms are catering for a diverse group of students from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. They argued that, due to the multicultural society present in Australia, it is almost impossible to assume that all students would be capable of engaging in this faith-formation process. Schools are increasingly being asked to find options to respond to the greater awareness and sensitivity that is needed towards other religious traditions. Religious subject matter is restricted when using the faith forming approach. Students learn very little, if anything, about other religions, and this will do little to develop inter-religious understandings. Lovat (1989) stated, "In practice, then, it would be quite possible for a

student to follow a Groome-type programme in religion and, at the end, be quite illiterate (and likely bigoted) concerning any other religion” (p. 45).

The curriculum writers of the Tasmanian GNL indicated<sup>5</sup> that they were aware of the critique of Groome’s Shared Christian Praxis approach. The decision to incorporate the model into the teaching approach of GNL came from their belief that it is one dimension of the four dimensions that inform the teaching of religion within the classroom. The third dimension of the framework, ‘curriculum dimension’, is now explored.

### *Curriculum Dimension*

The curriculum writers divided what could have been known as the ‘educational framework’, into two frameworks, namely, curriculum and pedagogy. This sub-division was made following the research of White (2004) within the diocese and culminated in the articulation of a pedagogical framework for religious education. White’s (2004) doctoral thesis argued that the educational focus that has characterised religious education in Australian Catholic schools since the middle 1990’s was too narrow, focusing largely on curriculum and content structures, as opposed to pedagogical practices.

The educational approach has influenced the development of religious education programs within Australia since the 1980’s. This shift to a more educational approach was in response to concerns surrounding the use of catechetical approaches in religious education classrooms (Hackett, 1995). In Australia, the study and publication of the works of Rummery (1975, 1977), “established a frame for exploring an approach to religious education in a Catholic school that distinguished and located its educational and its catechetical dimensions in their appropriate contexts” (Ryan, 2007, p. 136). Malone and Ryan’s (1996) research indicated that during the 1980’s and 1990’s, realisation grew that schools and

---

<sup>5</sup> Discussion held by the researcher with a member of the curriculum writing team on July 11<sup>th</sup> 2008.

classrooms were specific educational contexts with their own limitations. Further supporters of this approach were Crawford and Rossiter (1985, 1987, 1988), who have completed much of their research and practice in Catholic secondary school programs. They argued for an open, inquiring approach to the classroom religious education program that takes into account the personal, moral and spiritual development of students. Crawford & Rossiter (1987) also argued for the need to make a clear distinction between what happens in the religious education classroom, ‘education in religion,’ and the religious experiences that are provided in the Catholic school, ‘education in faith’. This duality within the field of religious education was also highlighted by Moran (1991), who argued that religious education is “teaching about religion” in addition to teaching students “to be religious” in a particular way (1991, p. 249). The distinctions in this concept are also acknowledged in the document published by the Congregation for Catholic Education (1988), *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* [RDECS], which distinguished the Catholic school’s role in catechesis from that of teaching an academic religion program. The RDECS document argued that the aim of catechesis, or handing on the Gospel message, happens mostly in a local Church community, whereas the aim of the school is knowledge (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988). The GNL document has made this delineation in the implicit and explicit programs within the model of religious formation for Catholic schools.

As a result of these concerns, and to add academic rigour to GNL, as experienced in other learning areas, the Tasmanian writers of the new religious education curriculum also adopted an ‘outcomes’ approach to learning, in addition to identifying standards and guides to help teachers in the selection of appropriate content and pedagogy. The curriculum dimension helps organise teaching and learning sequences. This suggests that the outcomes enable the teaching and learning process to focus on what the students will learn. The outcomes within the syllabus document support the assessment practices. A four-stage

process for programming and planning has been suggested. The writers have drawn on teaching frameworks as outlined in the Tasmanian Teaching and Learning Framework, and the works of Wiggins & McTighe (1998) and Erickson (2001, 2002). Principles outlined in these documents encourage teachers, "...to make judgments about important learning goals for their students, to decide on appropriate ways students can show their learning, and to plan the appropriate learning experiences for effective student learning" (GNL, 2006, p. 69). The learning sequences that teachers are required to plan include; a) enduring understandings; b) overarching goals/through lines; c) generative topics; and d) understanding goals.

### *Pedagogical Dimension*

The pedagogical dimension is an attempt to understand how students' best learn and is based on White's (2004) research. It represents and informs the selection of specific teaching practices that are to be used by teachers. The underlying belief is that a student learns religion in the same manner as other subjects. The RDECS (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988) also stated that schools should use the best educational methods that are available (1988, 70). Similarly, the *General Directory of Catechesis* (Congregation for the Clergy, 1998) argued that religious education must have both good content (religious curriculum) and good teaching processes (pedagogy). It is further anticipated that "sound pedagogical practice supports and complements the movements of shared Christian praxis" (GNL, 2006, p. 66).

GNL outlines White's (2004) DEEP framework as a tool to assist classroom practice. White stated that the framework reflects an integration of insights from brain-based theory with nuances from the contemporary Australian religious education literature. It identified the four interactive principles that are crucial to its application: Discernment, Enrichment, Engagement and Participation. The four principles as they are described in GNL (2006, pp.

66-69) are: a) Discernment: the generation of personal religious meaning and understanding; b) Enrichment: catering for individualised learning; c) Engagement: personal choice to be involved in the learning; and d) Participation: the communal dimension of the learning.

This framework was of particular interest to the researcher as it not only underpins the rationale for the pedagogical framework of GNL but it also forms the basis for the implementation of the professional learning programs offered by the Catholic Education Office, Hobart across the Catholic schools of the archdiocese.

### Good News for Living, Program Implementation

It is the responsibility of staff at the CEO to support schools in the implementation of GNL. To assist with the implementation, a range of professional learning opportunities to support schools and teachers were developed. This support included a variety of options that were generated at the 'system level'. Typical opportunities included: workshop activities for planning, 'new knowledge' opportunities with various 'expert' speakers and 'spiritual growth' retreats. These opportunities were available at a school and archdiocesan level. All teachers, with the approval of their Principal, had the opportunity to participate in these activities. It is a requirement of the CEO that each school appoint a Religious Education Coordinator (REC) or Assistant Principal Religious Education (APRE). The REC's and APRE's 'network' each term. These network meetings include the development of resources for teachers: the 'resource banks', the planning of learning sequences, assessment and implementation. At the school level it is the expectation that the REC or APRE will both co-ordinate and oversee the implementation of GNL. A member of the CEO faith team also visited the school each term to facilitate this process.

## Professional Learning for Religious Education

A powerful image that can be used for professional learning is the image of a bridge. A bridge, like professional learning, is a critical link between where a person is and where one wants to be. A bridge that worked in one place almost never works in another. Each bridge requires careful design that considers its purpose, who will use it, the conditions that exist at its anchor points (beginning, midway and end) and the resources that will be used to construct it. Similarly, each professional learning program or initiative requires a careful and unique design to best meet the needs of teachers and the students to be served (Loucks-Horsley, 1998).

Catholic schools in Tasmania are implementing new Guidelines (GNL) for the teaching of religion. The implementation of these guidelines requires teachers to develop their knowledge and their classroom teaching skills. To help teachers in this process of change, various professional learning opportunities were offered at a system and school level. The current provision of professional learning in religious education does not resemble the ideal of a sturdy bridge to the future, a critical link that is carefully and uniquely designed to meet the particular needs of teachers and students. Instead, the professional learning that teachers of religious education experience is typically weak, limited and fragmented, incapable of supporting them as they carry the weight of providing effective learning experiences. Programs often fall short of helping teachers to develop the depth of understanding that they require, as well as to discover how best to help their students learn and understand it.

The researcher believed that this weakness in current professional learning programs for teachers of religious education was a serious issue for Catholic schools in Tasmania. Unfortunately many teachers enter the classroom unprepared to teach religious education. This scenario is beginning to improve, as the CEO actively promotes and supports teachers to



complete a Graduate Certificate in Religious Education through the Australian Catholic University. However, the majority of teachers are not involved in this study program. The research described in this thesis aimed to provide information about professional learning experiences that most effectively developed teacher's knowledge.

One of the major complexities of the religious education program still lies in the question, '...what has faith got to do with it?' The problem lies, in part, in how teachers understand their role as religious educators. The researcher noticed that in classrooms, teachers seemed to isolate the material in GNL from the realities in the classrooms, as if one had nothing to do with the other. It was the belief of the researcher, as this research was undertaken, that there was still a lack of confidence experienced by teachers when teaching religious education, a view also shared by Malone & Ryan (1996), Graham (1997) and Rymarz (1997). Since the research of Graham (1997) and Malone & Ryan (1996), it is evident that teachers are beginning to bridge the gap, using strategies and pedagogies from their repertoire of teaching skills and applying these to religious education. In Tasmania, this has been significantly influenced by the development and implementation of the pedagogical 'DEEP' framework (White, 2004). Programming has been transformed with new models and a variety of resources are available to teachers. The researcher was interested in determining what professional learning experiences were influencing and/or changing teaching practices, and how these teaching practices were influencing learning for students.

### Aims of the Research

The first aim of the research was to develop a framework outlining the characteristics of effective professional learning activities for teachers of religious education. The framework was implemented and the connections between teacher's professional learning,

teacher growth, classroom instruction and improved student outcomes were explored. Therefore the aims of this research project were:

1. To determine teacher perceptions of the characteristics of effective professional learning in religious education.
2. To determine what factors associated with professional learning in religious education, teachers perceived as influencing their professional growth.
3. To determine teacher perception of professional growth in religious education and its impact on student outcomes.

### Conclusion

In this introductory chapter, the historical background and purpose of the study has been presented. The chapter outlined the problem to be investigated and explained the significance of the research within the context of the archdiocese of Hobart. It particularly highlighted the framework that was implemented with the introduction of the new Tasmanian religious education guidelines (GNL).

Chapter two provides a review of the literature from which the research focus came. Literature regarding: a) effective professional learning and characteristics of learning in schools; b) the teacher as learner; c) the importance of ‘teacher talk’; d) collaborative assessment in the role of professional learning was critically reviewed and synthesised.

Chapter three outlines the qualitative research process that included the epistemology, theoretical perspective and methodology of the research design. It situates the study within the constructivist paradigm, and provides a justification for the use of grounded theory as the preferred methodology, together with the use of structured and unstructured interviews, questionnaires and classroom observation.

Chapter four analyses the data and presents the theory generated from the key understandings that emerged from the data during phase one of the study.

Chapter five analyses the data and presents the theory generated from the key understandings during the second phase of data gathering process.

Chapter six provides a synthesis of the theory generated concerning effective characteristics of professional learning and proceeds to make recommendations for effective professional learning in Catholic primary schools that will promote teacher learning and, in turn, improve student outcomes for religious education.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter situated the critical issue of professional learning within the context of religious education and the implementation of new religious education guidelines (GNL) in the archdiocese of Hobart. To develop a theoretical understanding of effective work place professional learning for teachers, it is necessary to build from current scholarly literature in this field. While it was not possible to identify models of professional learning particular to religious education, this chapter reviews literature on the models of professional learning that have been used by schools in other curriculum areas. The second body of literature in this chapter includes literature on the present influences on professional learning. Within this section, the notion of work place learning and teacher learning is explored. Whilst the issue of learning and change is noted, the vast amount of literature on educational change was not explored as it was beyond the scope of this investigation. The third section analyses literature on the elements of effective professional learning. The final section within the review includes articulation of the professional learning framework used in the research. In addition to providing this framework for professional learning in a school, the literature review provides a context within which to discuss the research findings. Figure 2.1 provides a framework for the literature review.

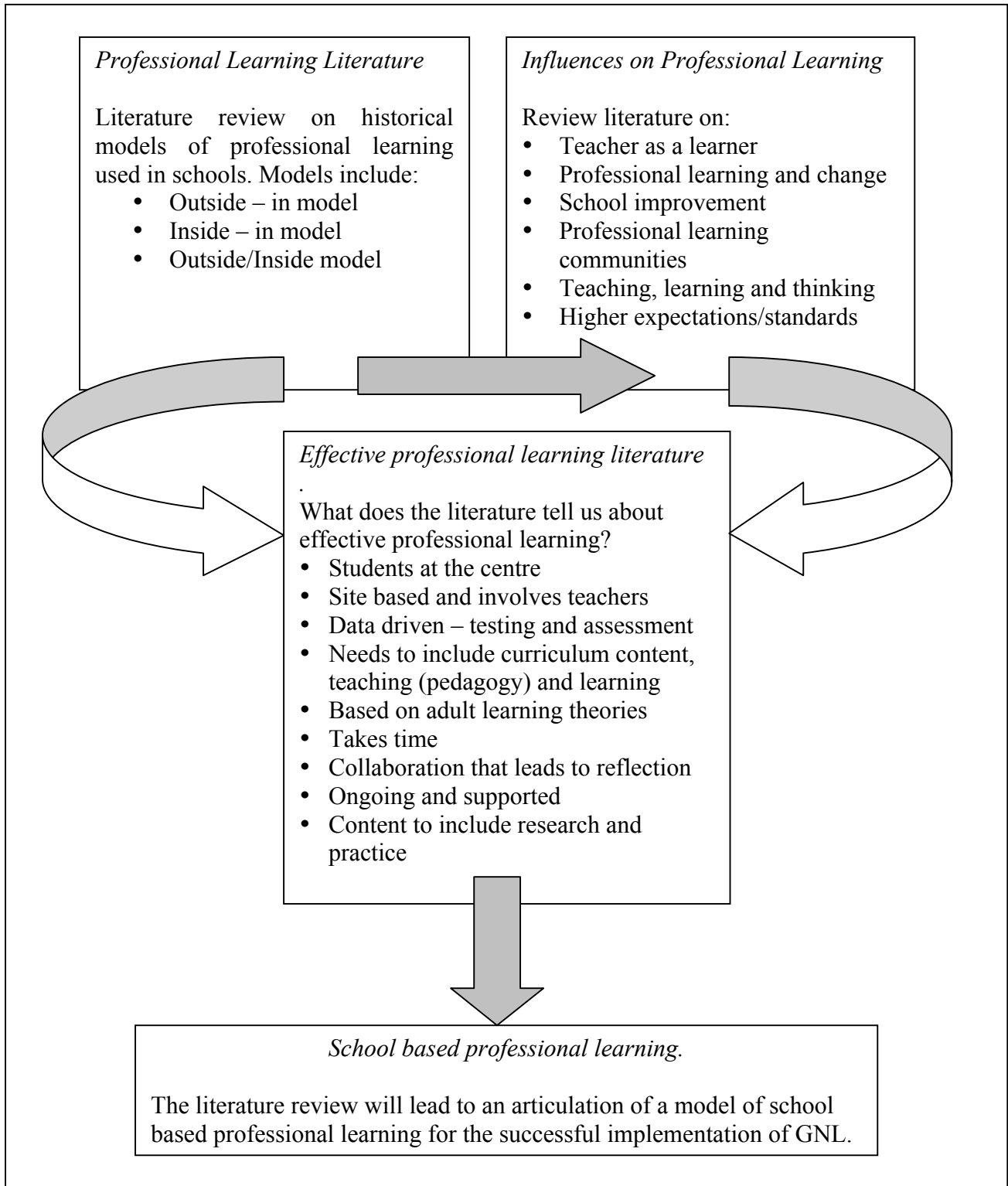


Figure 2.1. Literature Review Framework

## Historical Models<sup>6</sup> of Professional Learning

### *Introduction*

As noted in the definition of professional learning provided in Chapter one, the terms ‘in-service’, ‘training’, ‘staff development’, ‘professional development’ and ‘learning’ have been used interchangeably, both within the literature and within the school environments. Hoban (1997) stated that there are three models, or categories, of professional learning, and Welbourne (1995) noted that these models of teacher learning do, in fact, represent key differences. These three categories/models are now discussed.

### *The Outside-In Model of Professional Learning*

This conventional model of professional learning includes activities that present new knowledge to teachers and this knowledge is usually beyond the experiences of teachers attending the program (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1994, as cited in King, Hill & Retallick, 1997). This type of training in Australia has been typically known as in-service or workshop training. It is delivered in a structure where the presenter is considered the ‘expert’ in the particular field. This person controls the way information is presented and the content of the program. Many of these programs are designed to present teachers with new curricula, skills, pedagogies, and technologies that may be used in teacher practices. This approach can be conducted outside the school and classroom environment and is usually a ‘one off’ experience for teachers. The participants usually attend these sessions individually or with colleagues. If this approach is used within the school, an ‘expert’ is typically employed to

---

<sup>6</sup> The literature uses the word ‘model’ and ‘approach’ interchangeably. For consistency the word ‘model’ is used in this study.

present the ‘new’ information to teachers. This approach would not typically include any follow up by the presenter.

Hoban’s (1997), outside-in model is represented in Figure 2.2.

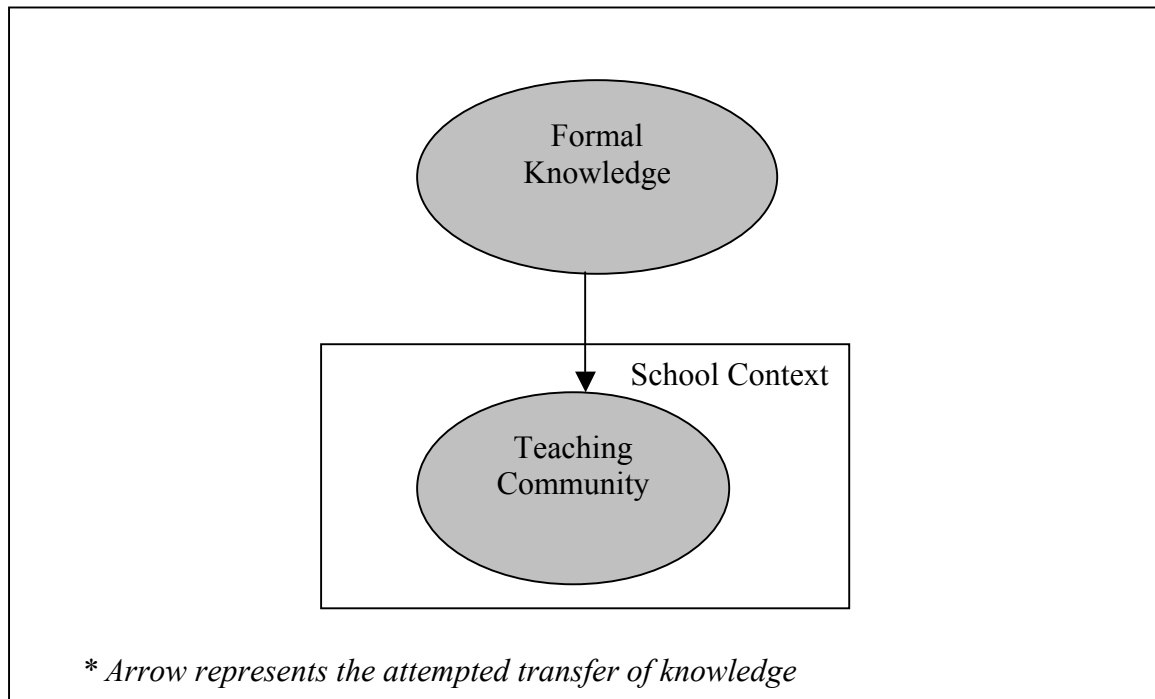


Figure 2.2 Outside-in professional learning models Hoban, (1997).

The literature is critical of this model of professional learning. It is described as a ‘one-shot’ (Corcoran, 1995, p. 3; Fullan, 1991; Guskey, 1986) or ‘deficit model’, that is aimed at teacher mastery of prescribed knowledge and/or skills. The critiques of this model of professional learning to effect teacher change have included the following concerns: a) teachers found these experiences to be limited and irrelevant to the realities of their classroom and of little value to improving their teaching practices (Corcoran, 1995; Smylie, 1989); b) the model tended to increase the isolation felt by teachers, as there are no opportunities for further dialogue (Lieberman & Miller, 2000); and c) the content of the programs rarely addressed the individual needs of participants. Follow up opportunities, support or evaluations rarely existed. Adult learning styles were rarely a consideration and there were few opportunities for any follow up programs (Fullan, 1991).

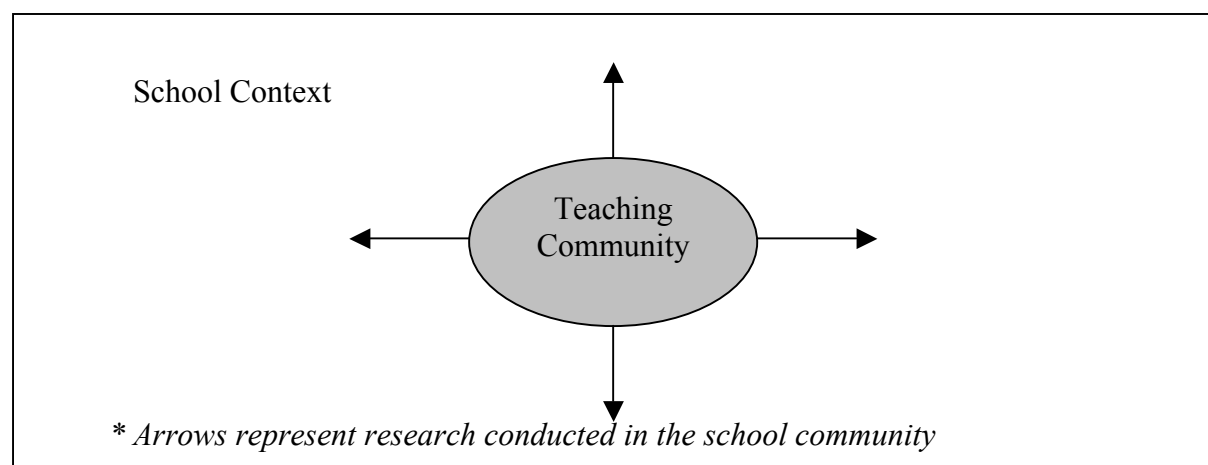
Despite these limitations, the model does have its strengths. These strengths include the fact that this model can be an economical method of professional learning, as it requires the expertise of only a few for the presentation of information. The information provided can also be presented to a large number of teachers at any given time, and the opportunity to attend an activity often allows teachers to interact with peers and colleagues from other schools.

This ‘outside-in’ model is a ‘typical’ model of professional learning used by teachers, schools, and the archdiocesan Catholic education system in Tasmania. There are numerous opportunities for teachers of religious education to participate in ‘one off’ workshops, lectures, conferences and in-service activities.

### *Inside-In Models of Professional Learning*

#### *Introduction*

The second model discussed by Hoban (1997) is termed the ‘inside-in’ model of professional learning. This model places great importance on the teaching community taking charge of their own learning, as opposed to seeking the perspective of the ‘outside expert’. Hoban’s (1997) inside-in professional learning model is represented in Figure 2.3.



*Figure 2.3. Inside-in professional learning model (Hoban, 1997)*



Within this model, individuals are encouraged to take responsibility for their own professional learning. Sparks & Loucks-Horsley (1989) argued that individuals are capable of self-direction and self initiated learning. Further, they stated that adults learn most effectively when they initiate and plan their own learning activities as opposed to spending time in activities that have been designed for them by others and which are not necessarily relevant to their needs.

Hoban (1997) outlined four models that exist within this ‘inside-in’ model. These four models “all draw upon teachers’ existing knowledge but vary according to the extent that teachers collaborate with their colleagues...” (Hoban, 1997, p. 6). Not all the features of these models are discussed here, however, those most commonly used in Australian schools, reflective practice, learning together and action research, are explored in further detail.

### *Learning Together and Reflective Practice*

One of the most popular features of the ‘inside-in model,’ is the notion of ‘learning together’ and ‘reflective practice’. This notion of professional learning offers practicing teachers the opportunity to exchange pedagogical knowledge and ideas at school. Features of this notion of learning together involve teachers working in groups or pairs. Sparks & Loucks-Horsley (1989) suggested that this approach would encourage teachers to view change efforts in a positive manner and continue to improve their own practices. “A key aspect for teacher learning underpinning inside-in models is personal reflection, to assist teachers to become more aware of how they understand practice” (Hoban, 1997, p. 6). Reflective practice recognises that there is no one ‘best way’ in planning educational programs (White & O'Brien, 1999). The decision making process needs to respond to a number of features that define the event to be decided. Different situations and thinking styles, different goals and purposes, different motives, different problems and different

desired outcomes will result in a choice of different strategies. The purpose of reflective practice is to match the most appropriate decision making strategy with the current situation. It is therefore necessary to ensure that flexibility is built into the process, so that the strategies that are employed truly meet the desired outcomes of the learning community. The notion of teachers working together changes the isolation that is often felt by teachers (Bryk, Rollow, & Pinnell, 1996; Loucks-Horsley et al., 1998). Teachers in a learning community work together to share both their challenges and success, they receive support and learn from one another, and gain the confidence to change their teaching practices to better support the students learning needs (Lieberman & Miller, 2000; Loucks-Horsley et al., 1998). A distinctive feature of this inside-in model is that it occurs in the work place, the school.

#### *Action Research as an Inside-In Model*

Action research as developed by Kemmis (1981) is a popular model of inside-in professional learning that is featured in the literature. It can be defined as:

... a disciplined process of inquiry conducted by and for those taking the action. The primary reason for engaging in action research is to assist the 'actor' in improving/refining his or her actions (Sagor, 2000, p. 3).

In this instance the action research links reflection to action, to generate knowledge about practice (Hoban, 1997). The most important factor noted about action research is that it can help educators to be more effective at what they care about, their own teaching and the development of their students. An individual, group, or entire school staff can carry out the action research process. In this instance it is described as an inside-in model. However, if the school or individual action researcher involves an outside body or organisation, this particular model can also be used as an inside/outside model. The inside/outside model is discussed in the following section.

The strengths of the inside-in models of professional learning are that they encourage teachers to be proactive and responsible for their own learning. The major limitation associated with this model is that teacher's interpretation of data and experiences are based on their current teacher practices. This is more prevalent in teachers who are working and researching in isolation as opposed to those belonging to a 'group'. The limitation is that if there is no alternative perspective to challenge the existing assumption, it can lead to unreflective reproduction of ongoing practice (Hoban, 1997). "When you don't know what you don't know, it is difficult to see what needs to be done" (Fullan, Hill & Crevola, 2006, p. 6).

The inside-in model of professional learning has also been used for religious education in schools across Tasmania. Teachers have been involved in the process of developing the units of work using the resource banks as outlined in GNL. Teachers participating in the research program work together with colleagues for a variety of activities. Typical activities within these collegial groups include collaborative programming and planning. The experience of the researcher indicates that, although elements of the inside-in model are evident in Tasmanian Catholic schools, they appear in a more unsystematic fashion and, although curriculum development is an element of professional learning (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989), more often than not, it becomes the only purpose, and there is little time or opportunity for teachers to construct knowledge that allows for a deeper understanding of teaching and learning.

### *Inside/Outside Models of Professional Learning*

The third model described by Hoban (1997) is the inside/outside model of professional learning. This model "draws upon both the knowledge that teachers have generated from their experiences and the knowledge of others..." (Hoban, 1997, p. 11).

The inside/outside model as outlined by Hoban (1997) is represented in Figure 2.4.

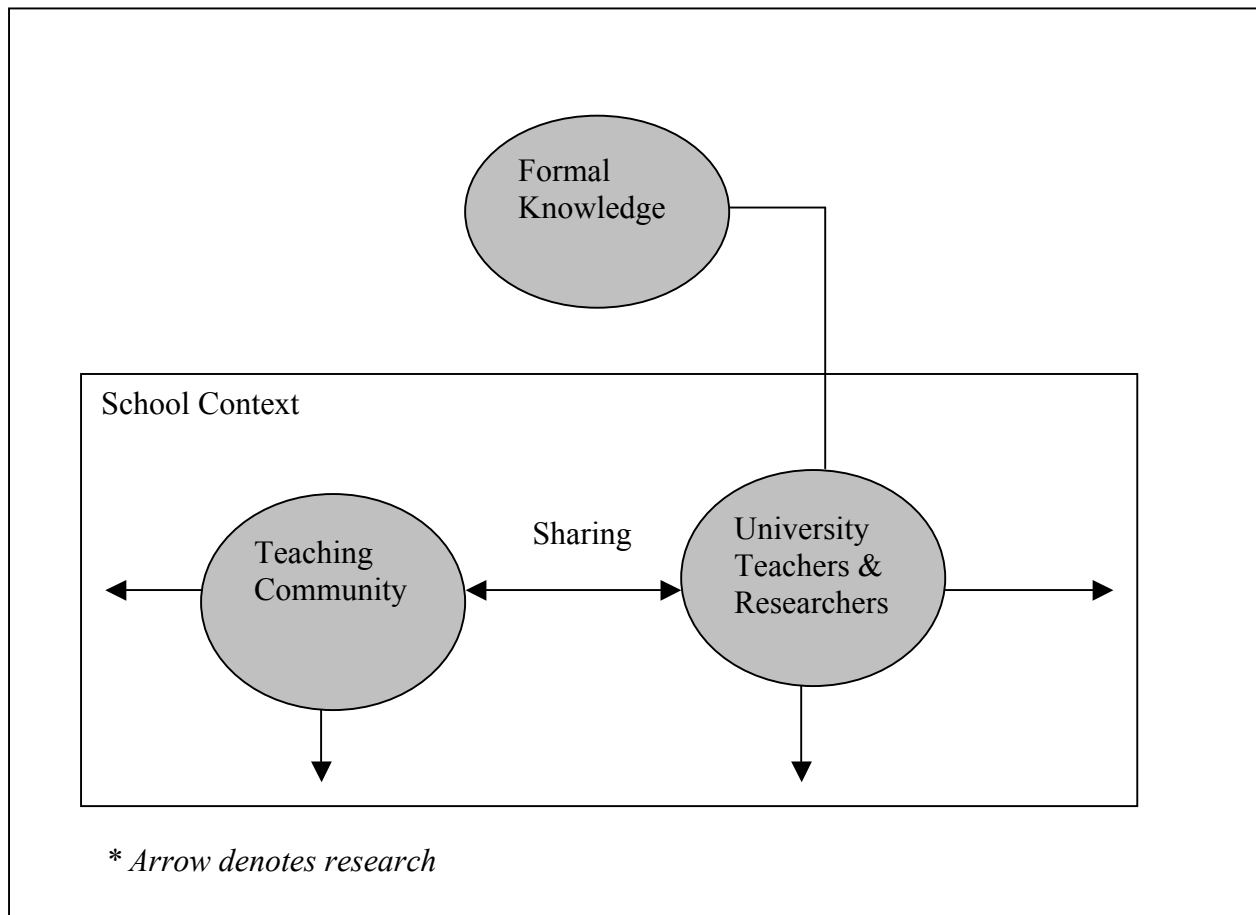


Figure 2.4. Inside/outside professional learning model (Hoban, 1997)

According to Hoban (1997), these models focus on education for pre-service and practicing teachers. For the purpose of this study, only literature pertaining to practicing teachers is discussed. Underpinning these inside/outside models are two aspects of teacher learning. Lieberman and Miller (2000) stated that teacher's growth and knowledge come about in a variety of ways. Teachers learn from outside knowledge, for example, research, conferences, workshops, speakers, books and consultants, and they also learn from each other, from looking at and discussing student work and from examining their own practice. It is suggested that this kind of professional learning has the potential to change the way that schools and educational organisations think about the delivery of programs and the organisations that support them (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Lieberman & Miller, 2000).

Within this inside/outside model of professional learning, either the researcher, outside educational body, school or teacher can set the agenda. This allows for a wide variety of perspectives to be gathered.

The inside/outside model also attempts to integrate the ideas from theory and practice in order to establish a greater understanding of how theory may be used within the school setting. Professional learning projects that used this inside/outside model in the late 1980's and 1990's in Australia include the *Project of Enhancing Effective Learning* (PEEL), which involved action research by teachers working collaboratively with university educators in an effort to describe 'good learning strategies'. The implementation of the *Early Literacy In-Service Program* (ELIC) and the *First Steps Literacy and Numeracy* programs originating in Western Australia also involved teachers working with University educators. Within these professional learning models, tutors were trained by outside organisations (Universities and Education Departments), to lead teaching changes and reforms within their own schools.

The strengths of the inside/outside models of professional learning are that they involve the interaction between teacher knowledge and knowledge generated from other educational agencies. These collaborations usually promote teacher professionalism and change the isolation that is often felt by teachers. Teachers have the opportunity to work together not only with their peer colleagues, but also with colleagues from other educational institutions, to share both their challenges and successes. This often gives teachers the confidence to change their teaching practices to better support student learning needs (Lieberman & Miller, 2000; Loucks-Horsley et al., 1998).

Teachers in Tasmania have had some opportunity to participate in these professional learning activities. However, participation has been limited. At the time of preparing this thesis, a small number of schools and teachers within the archdiocese were participating in the *First Steps Mathematics* program. The system's move to a statewide 'moderation' process

for mathematics and religious education is another opportunity for teachers to participate in an inside/outside model of professional learning.

The three models of professional learning as outlined by Hoban (1997) have been examined. The models are particularly relevant to the research as they highlight the models that are presently used in Tasmanian Catholic schools. The most commonly used model is the outside-in model, and all teachers of religious education are familiar with this model. The ‘beginning of the school year’ typically begins with a workshop or conference that is led by an ‘expert.’ However, the appointment of RECs within the school encourages school communities to use the inside-in model of professional learning. The RECs typically work together with teaching staff to plan and program various learning opportunities for teachers and students. The CEO has recently developed a moderation process for religious education. This process is an example of the outside/inside model of professional learning. The RECs are working together with systemic expertise, which is followed by working with teachers in schools.

## Influences on Professional Learning

### *Introduction*

The literature indicated that recent developments in education have influenced the context of teaching and professional learning in schools. Past models of educational change in religious education were often promoted through the development of curriculum guidelines and texts. The curriculum writers of GNL and personnel from the CEO in Hobart acknowledge that the development of professional learning for teachers needs to be achieved in order to implement any change. It is widely acknowledged that to achieve any significant and lasting change in education, the central focus must be on teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1997; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005c; Fashola & Slavin, 1998; Fullan, 2001; Joyce &

Showers, 2002; Lieberman & Miller, 2000). This section examines the literature related to teachers and the notion of teacher learning.

### *Images of Teacher Learning*

Within the three models of professional learning, as outlined by Hoban (1997), we have the teacher as a learner. Developing schools as places for teachers, as well as students, to learn, is a concept that features prominently in the literature of professional learning communities (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005b; DuFour et al., 2005c; Hargreaves, 2007; Kiefer Hipp & Bumpers Huffman, 2007; Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2007; Lieberman, 2007; Little & Horn, 2007; Reeves, 2005; Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007; Sykes, 1999; Tallerico, 2005). The implementation of GNL requires teachers of religious education in Tasmania to pay attention to their knowledge of religious education, that is, theology and Scripture, their instructional practice or teaching of the subject, that is pedagogy, and the way in which students learn the subject. In this case, teachers need to learn (and in some cases unlearn) knowledge, processes and practices. In this instance, teacher learning is central to the successful implementation of GNL in Tasmanian Catholic schools.

In addition to the implementation of GNL within the school, the implementation of effective practices for professional learning for teachers require structural changes and cannot succeed unless teachers change their beliefs, practices and the way in which they work with others. The move to collaborative team structures for programming and planning, and other organisational changes, typically place a burden on teachers, as learning is associated with change. Again, these changes within the school's organisational structure require teacher learning. This image of the 'teacher as a learner' is worth exploration.

Sykes (1999) presented three images of teacher learning within the present educational system. In his first image, he presented the teacher as a consumer. In the second,

the teacher performed as an independent, “building up knowledge, skill and materials,” and thirdly, the teacher acted as “a professional who orients (his/her) work according to communal and collegial norms” (p. 154). Sykes noted that each of these images contained a partial truth about professional learning.

In the first image as presented by Sykes (1999), the ‘teacher as consumer’ participated in various learning opportunities. Within the Tasmanian Catholic education system these include the service delivery models of professional learning that are offered. They may often be linked to accreditation, academic requirements, salary scales, new knowledge and teacher’s personal interests. This type of professional learning is usually centrally planned, uniformly provided, and regulated within certain structures. Teachers are the consumers because many options are available to meet common requirements. The image of ‘keeping your options open and not committing’ to describe young people and religious choices (Rymarz, 2007) can also fit professional learning in this instance. The teacher is the consumer in the professional learning marketplace, keeping their options open, free to choose from the available opportunities and not necessarily committing.

In an era of intense change within schools – with projects such as school improvement, improved student outcomes, local partnerships, mentoring, collaborative structures, team programming and planning, teaching for learning, national testing, standards, moderation, essential learnings – teachers are already engaged in professional learning, as new demands are placed on them.<sup>7</sup> At any given time teachers may be participating in any or all of these activities. Equally, teachers may choose not to participate, unless the change has been mandated. Although many options may be available to teachers, considerable discretion resides with the teacher. From this, it is evident that local contexts are extremely important. Sykes (1999) noted that the case studies of Huberman (1993), Spillane (1995), and

---

<sup>7</sup> These elements of ‘change’ are experienced by the teachers and staff in the school that participated in the research project.



McCarthy and Peterson (1993) indicated that teachers “individually and collectively construct their own learning opportunities out of the variable elements available to them” (Sykes, 1999, p. 156) and that these opportunities are usually governed by career and developmental stages of the individual. Sykes pointed out that the factors that promote teacher involvement within the school are the culture and structure of the work organisation. In this image, the teacher is “the craftsman building knowledge and skills” (p. 156).

Sykes’ (1999) third image of the teacher, however, challenges the notion of the first two images. In this image, the teacher is constructed as a social being within a particular school culture. In this third image, schools are defined as organisations that influence people, and professional learning is not seen as a discrete variable activity, but rather a regular, ongoing activity within the school’s program. In this way, participation is ensured. “In such schools the professional practitioner, rather than the independent artisan, becomes the guiding metaphor for teacher learning” (Sykes, 1999, p. 157). Within the literature such schools are defined as professional learning communities (DuFour, 2004; DuFour et al., 2005c) and this notion is further explored in the literature review.

Teacher ‘learning’ was central to the implementation of GNL. Teachers needed to learn new subject content and subject pedagogies. Teachers also needed to change their teaching practices and learn new content to successfully implement the new Guidelines. Teachers needed to ‘learn’ and to ‘change’. The review literature also used the words teacher ‘learning’ and ‘change’ interchangeably. Literature on teacher and educational change, as well as professional learning as a change process is now reviewed.

### *Teacher and Educational Change – Professional Learning as a Change Process*

Teacher change has often been linked to professional learning. However, there have been significant shifts in the focus, from the notion of ‘change as an event,’ to ‘change as a

complex process' that involves learning (Fullan, 1991; Guskey, 1986; Senge, 2000; Stoll, Fink, & Earl, 2003; Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007). Educational change is multidimensional and there is no shortage of literature on the subject. The second image of teacher learning as outlined by Sykes (1999) highlighted many of the contextual 'changes' facing teachers and schools, and this promises to change even more in the coming century. The works of Fullan (1991, 1993, 2001, 2005a, 2005b; 2006) and Hargreaves (1994, 1995, 2007) highlighted that professional learning itself is change and can be one of the most effective strategies for promoting meaning and improvement. The developments as listed by Fullan and Hargreaves are all elements of 'change', which are currently facing schools. For the purpose of this research, the literature pertaining to professional learning as a change process is explored and the three guiding principles for professional learning that effectively promote significant and sustained change are proposed.

Firstly, professional learning needs to recognise that teacher learning is a gradual process that can be difficult and takes time. Furthermore, the risk of failure is inherent in any change process and can promote feelings of anxiety in teachers. Teachers need time to trial new innovations (Fullan, 1991; Loucks-Horsley, 1998). Secondly, if professional learning is to promote authentic and enduring change, it is imperative that teachers receive ongoing feedback regarding student improvement and student learning. Most teachers seek to ensure that student learning is meaningful and the implementation of any new practice is sustained only if there is evidence of continuous successful student learning. Conversely, studies have suggested that innovations will be abandoned if there is no evidence of improvement in student outcomes. Therefore, professional learning must incorporate regular and precise procedures by which teachers can measure the impact of their new practice on student learning (Guskey, 1986). The third necessary principle is the need for continuous support and follow up for teachers. As previously mentioned, time and experimentation are essential for

teachers when they are integrating and internalising new innovations into their current practices. To support teachers as they trial new pedagogies and lesson content, continued support and encouragement should be offered through processes offered in collaborative structures and coaching (Guskey, 1986).

Loucks-Horsley (1998) noted that professional learning must also align with and support system-based changes that promote student learning. They believe that professional learning has long suffered because of its separation from other critical elements of the education system, with the result that new ideas and strategies are not implemented. Although professional learning is not a panacea, it can support changes in such areas as curriculum and assessment, in addition to creating a culture with the capacity for continuous improvement that is so critical for educators facing current and future challenges.

### *School Improvement and Professional Learning*

Hawley and Valli (1999) indicated that one of the most persistent research findings on school improvement is the relationship that exists between school improvement and professional learning of teachers. "...We will fail...to improve schooling for children until we acknowledge the importance of schools not only as places for teachers to work but also as places for teachers to learn" (Smylie, 1989, p. 544). This theme was also reiterated by Fullan (1991, p. 331): "Staff development cannot be separated from school development." The school effectiveness research literature indicated that certain characteristics are found in schools that support teacher learning (McGaw, Piper, Banks, & Evans, 1992). Those listed in the research included shared goals, teacher's sense of efficacy, collaborative cultures and teacher commitment.

To develop the characteristic of 'shared goals', teachers must develop a shared understanding of the purposes, processes and rationale involved in any change and must

believe that they can make a difference (Fullan, 1991). A teacher's sense of efficacy is enhanced when teachers have the opportunity to see new strategies modeled, have opportunities for practice, peer mentoring and coaching and use new teaching and learning strategies regularly and appropriately (Guskey, 1986; 1995; 2000, 2002; 2007; Joyce & Showers, 2002). It is likely that teachers will want to continue with the improvement process and be more willing to participate if they experience success in their efforts (Guskey, 1995, 2002, 2007). The literature indicated that teachers need time to work together and develop purposeful social and collaborative cultures. Teacher 'isolation' was identified as a major source of dissatisfaction over twenty years ago (Lortie, 1975), and teachers often felt unsupported in adopting new teaching strategies. Without help in reflecting on teaching practice and instruction on new teaching strategies, most people can make very few changes in their behaviour (Joyce & Showers, 1995).

The school improvement literature reviewed for this thesis required schools to be more like learning communities than hierarchical bureaucracies. The literature acknowledged that there is no more effective way to school improvement than to invest in professional learning. These new visions of schooling require shared leadership, team work and collective responsibility for student learning, all of which can be promoted through collaborative professional learning (DuFour, 2004; DuFour et al., 2005b, 2005c; Joyce & Showers, 1995, 2002; Lambert, 1998).

### *Schools as Professional Learning Communities*

There is no universal definition of a professional learning community. However:

there is a consensus that you know one exists when you see a group of teachers sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; Toole & Louis, 2002 as cited in Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007, p. 2).

The literature indicated that during the 1990's there was an emphasis on schools as 'professional communities', however, Stoll & Seashore Louis (2007) noted that it is not insignificant that the word 'learning' has been added as, "Learning in the context of professional communities involves working together towards a common understanding of concepts and practices" (p. 3). The professional community literature assumes that the group's objective is to make a difference to the students. The notion of a professional learning community suggests that:

the focus is not just on individual teachers' learning but on (1) professional learning; (2) within the context of a cohesive group; (3) that focuses on collective knowledge; and (4) occurs within an ethic of interpersonal caring that permeates the life of teachers, students and school leaders (Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007, p. 3).

In school communities where change and school improvement to improve student learning outcomes are the vision, teachers receive support, learn from one another and gain confidence for changing their practice to better meet the needs of students (Hargreaves, 1994, 2007; Lieberman & Miller, 2000).

### *Research on Teaching, Learning and Thinking*

The wider society is demanding a different kind of citizen, worker, and thinker. Basic skills are still seen as necessary but no longer sufficient. The curriculum calls for students to not only demonstrate knowledge and skills but also to demonstrate 'understanding' (Archdiocese of Hobart, 2005; Department of Education Tasmania, 2002; Erickson, 2002; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). Teaching pedagogies need to change so that students are moved, "beyond recall, recognition and reproduction, toward evaluation, analysis, synthesis and production" (Lieberman & Miller, 2000, p. 55).

White (2004) articulated a pedagogical framework for religious education as part of his doctoral thesis. This framework has been adopted by the archdiocese of Tasmania and there is an expectation that it will be used in the implementation of GNL. To implement this framework, teachers need to have an understanding of current learning theories<sup>8</sup> and brain-based research. To apply these new teaching strategies to classrooms requires a significant shift in practice for most teachers. Teachers need to learn a ‘new repertoire’ of skills and know when to use them in a teaching situation.

The new ‘pedagogies’ expected of teachers are very different from the teaching approaches that have been used in the past. The research literature indicated that professional learning could facilitate learning for teachers on how to use and facilitate learning in their classrooms.

### *Higher Standards for All Students*

The final factor to be explored as influencing professional learning is ‘student standards’. Expectations of students to achieve at higher standards have come with advances in knowledge. The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), as developed by the Australian Council of Educational research (ACER) was introduced in May 2008 to all students in grades three and five and reflects the nation-wide commitment to educate all children to higher levels of accomplishment, knowledge and skills. Basic skills preoccupy many schools. However, the future of education, particularly education in Catholic schools, goes beyond this basic learning to other forms of academic learning including religious education.

---

<sup>8</sup> Teachers need to have an understanding of student and adult learning and development theories.

All new curriculum initiatives, including GNL, ask teachers to ensure that ‘students develop rich understandings of content, think critically, solve problems, synthesise information, invent, create, proficiently express themselves, be responsible citizens and life long learners’ (Archdiocese of Hobart, 2005; Department of Education Tasmania, 2002). The character of the knowledge and skills in which students must participate and master is changing rapidly.

Teachers in this changing environment need to ensure that they have an understanding of how students learn to ensure that students are mastering more complex knowledge and developing capabilities for complex problem solving. The literature indicated that professional learning for teachers is a significant contributor to student learning and has the potential of improving student outcomes (Danielson, 2002; Darling-Hammond 1997; Fullan et al., 2006; Marzano, 2000, 2003b, 2007).

In conclusion, the research literature on the influences on professional learning includes changes to the image of a teacher, professional learning as a change process, school improvement and the notion of professional learning communities. In schools, there is a continued focus on improving to enhance student learning, therefore the research included a review of teaching, learning and thinking in addition to the higher expectations and standards that are being expected of students. The demands on schools and teachers to produce citizens who are problem solvers, critical thinkers and who demonstrate mastery of skills at a higher level than before, all highlight the need for schools to change. The ‘bridge’ to this process can be professional learning. The next section provides a review of the design characteristics for effective professional learning.

## Design Characteristics for Effective Professional Learning

### *Introduction*

Clearly the conventional outside-in model (Hoban, 1997) of professional learning can no longer support teachers in meeting the needs and challenges of educational reform and the constant drive to improve content and standards for student learning. Professional learning opportunities for teachers that enhance the development of their own personal knowledge, intellectual capacities and professional orientation using the inside-in and outside/inside models (Hoban, 1997) are critical to a teacher's management of 'change', which is paramount to the profession. This reflects the constructivist's philosophy of learning. Rather than viewing knowledge as being transmitted from teacher to student, the proponents of constructivism believe that learners create their own knowledge based on their interactions with the world (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). Consistent with the theories of adult learning, a constructivist model of professional learning is premised on the belief that teachers learn most effectively when they actively direct their own learning opportunities. In developing professional learning opportunities for teachers the literature indicated that both the process and content must be considered. Prominent theorists (Darling-Hammond 1997; Fullan, 2005a; Fullan et al., 2006; Guskey, 2007; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Lieberman, 2007; Lieberman & Miller, 2000; Tallerico, 2005) indicated that teacher learning occurs most readily when teachers have opportunities for active intellectual engagement when developing new models of professional learning. It is more likely that these will be developed within a specific context. Rather than develop another 'one size fits all model', schools should be developing models that address their particular contextual needs. Although the literature and research studies vary in the themes and purposes they present, there is a consensus within the field on the design principles, or characteristics of successful and effective professional learning that address both the process and the content of the professional learning opportunities for teachers. The research indicated that these design principles must provide collegial learning opportunities for teachers that are linked to student



learning (Darling-Hammond 1997; DuFour et al., 2005c; Fullan, 2001; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Lieberman & Miller, 2000). The researchers claimed that if these characteristics are included within a program, it is more likely to result in substantial and lasting changes to knowledge, skills and behaviours of teachers. If these changes are made to the teaching and learning process, then there is an ability to improve learning outcomes for students. These characteristics are now explored.

### *Professional Learning Must Have Students and their Learning at the Core*

Fullan's (1991) extensive ten-year research indicated that professional learning needs to be targeted directly at the teacher's practice and student outcomes. All within the research field accept this point. Teachers need to learn how to analyse both their own teaching practice and that of others. In order for this to occur a link needs to be developed between teaching and learning, for this allows the teacher to identify a student who is not learning and find ways to overcome the situation. For this to be successful, teachers need to develop a repertoire of teaching skills (pedagogies), ensuring that they have the skills to meet the needs of all learners. Loucks-Horsley (1998) also noted that the principles that guide the improvement of student learning should also guide professional learning for teachers. Professional developers must teach by example because people can only teach in ways in which they have learned. Engaging in active learning, focusing on fewer ideas more deeply and learning collaboratively are all principles that must characterise learning for teachers, if they in turn are to apply these principles to helping their students learn.

### *Testing and Assessment*

The current political environment emphasises student-learning outcomes and this is measured by performance on standard driven examinations. In Australia, state and territory

standards were developed following the national curriculum work, which developed curriculum statements and profiles in eight key learning areas. More recently, the national benchmarks for literacy and numeracy (NAPLAN, 2008) also set expectations for student achievement. This data of student test results and scores has been elevated significantly in recent years and can form a powerful stimulus to instructional practice that in turn is related to student learning. Stoll and Seashore Louis (2007) indicated that an analysis of student achievement in schools showed that a group of teachers focusing on student achievement made a significant difference to measurable student outcomes. This also included analysing data at a school level, and making links with school improvement efforts and strategic plans. What schools should be looking for are the gaps; the discrepancies between where the school community believes that its student should be and where they in fact are. It is important at this level to ensure that student-learning gaps are judged as the most important to the school (Fullan, 2001). This means that professional learning should focus on the curriculum, but more specifically, the parts of the curriculum with which students struggle most. Change experts point out that small steps and tangible classroom results motivate teachers and have an impact on student performance, more directly than do larger, more complex school improvement initiatives (Fullan, 2001).

Although student data is seen as a source for professional learning, the literature indicated that a heavy reliance on standardised tests employed for external accountability does not give teachers information about student learning and development, and teachers should be experimenting with new practices of designing ‘authentic’ assessment tasks and documenting children’s learning. Practices include creating scoring rubrics, evaluating student work samples, moderating these samples and collectively developing standards for evaluations. Many examples of new approaches to assessment and documentation of student learning are emerging (Stoll et al., 2003). The types of assessment and documentation of

student learning should provide a basis for decision-making about student and teacher learning. The features that need to be included in this process are that teachers need to be engaged in all aspects of the assessment including the design of exercises, development of the scoring rubrics and standards, and the administration and scoring of student performance and reporting of the results. The assessments themselves may rely on multiple forms and evidence over a period of time. The process also needs to draw teachers together to discuss individual student learning and development (Stoll et al., 2003).

### *Curriculum Content, Teaching and Learning*

Sykes (1999) indicated that teachers need greater opportunities to work directly with the content of the student curriculum, that is, the subject matter, the teaching, and the learning. He stated:

1. Teachers need to deepen their own understanding of the subject matter and the skill related content.
2. Teachers need to understand the various ways of representing and conveying that content in instruction and
3. Teachers need to understand how students learn the content (p. 163).

The study of Cohen and Hill (1997) also revealed that teachers' knowledge of subject content is related to student achievement:

When teachers have significant opportunity to learn the content that their students will study, in ways that seem to enable them to learn more about teaching that material. And when assessments are linked to the student and teacher curriculum, teachers' opportunities to learn pay off in their student's performance (p. 26).

This theme was also articulated by Loucks-Horsley (1998) who stated that excellent teachers have a very special kind of knowledge that must be developed through their professional learning. They too reiterated that teachers need to know their craft, that they need pedagogical knowledge. This involves knowing how to teach specific educational concepts to young people at different developmental levels. This kind of knowledge and skill is the unique province of teachers and distinguishes what they know from what 'experts' know.

Knowledge of content, although critical, is not sufficient, just as knowledge of general pedagogy is not enough. Loucks-Horsley (1998) maintained that the goal of developing pedagogical content knowledge must also be the focus of professional learning opportunities for teachers.

To focus teacher learning on student learning requires a shared school curriculum. This is possible with the implementation of GNL and therefore, professional learning can be organised around teacher interactions within the school. Again, the focus needs to be on what students learn. When new programs or initiatives are to be implemented, too often little or no reference is made to what the students learn. The work of Fashola & Slavin (1998) indicated that relatively few school-wide innovations have been validated for their impact on student learning.

Professional learning, when it is student centered, focuses and defines what teachers need to learn to improve their teaching, which in turn, will improve student outcomes. The learning needs to be grounded in the classroom, focusing on lessons, assessments, and student work. In this model, professional learning shifts from adult learning to student outcomes.

### *Professional Learning Should be Site-Based and Involve Teachers*

Designing professional learning activities at the school level empowers staff to develop ownership of their own learning, in addition to addressing the needs of the school, the students and teachers. Therefore, it should be site-based and integral to the operations of the school (Hawley & Valli, 1999; Joyce & Showers, 2002). Furthermore, site-based learning has the opportunity to acknowledge the personal identities and moral purposes of teachers, in addition to addressing the cultures and contexts in which they work (Hargreaves, 1995).

In addition to the school being the most appropriate setting for teachers to learn, Moore Johnson & Kardos (2002) also suggested that it is also the most effective setting for

beginning teachers to learn, as they have the opportunity to dialogue with more experienced teachers as soon as the need arises, as opposed to waiting until the ‘expert or consultant’ visits the school, or the teacher has the opportunity to attend a professional learning activity.

Designing activities at the school site does not exclude teachers from accessing ‘outside’ learning experiences. In many instances, these will still be required as teachers complete formal study programs and accreditation. However, there is a consensus within the research that the school site is the optimal place for learning to occur. The process of professional learning should include the teachers who are participating in the learning. This engagement will increase teachers’ motivation and commitment to learn (Hawley & Valli, 1999). Studies have found that if teachers are not involved in the process and are denied a contribution to their own professional learning, they tend to become detached and often reject school improvement efforts (Hargreaves, 1995).

#### *Professional Learning Must Take Adult Learning Theories into Consideration*

Adult learning is different from student learning (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b). Children’s learning focuses on socialising and conforming to group norms and on forming meaning, values, skills and strategies. In contrast to this, the adult learner must acquire the processes and strategies necessary to promote learning. The adult learner primarily focuses on solving personal problems, acquiring necessary role behaviours, and transforming meanings, values, skills and strategies (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b). In addition to this, it is also necessary to take into account that people learn in different ways, utilising different intelligences (Gardner, 1995, 1999). Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (1998) outlined five principles to supporting professional learning. These included active engagement, relevance to current challenges, and integration of experience, learning style variation, choice and self-direction. Adult learning theory also indicated that it is important to ensure that adults have

the opportunity for self-directedness, to shape what and how they learn and to use the prior knowledge and experience of individuals to support and develop the ‘new’ learning (Knowles et al., 1998).

### *Professional Learning Takes Time*

One of the most fundamental features of an effective professional learning program that has been gleaned from the literature is time (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Meiers & Ingvarson, 2003). Teaching is a complex task and more time than is available is required for teachers and other educators to test out new ideas, assess their effects, adjust their strategies and approaches, and assess again, in an effort to reach all students and to make learning meaningful. Professional learning, therefore, can no longer be viewed as an event that occurs on a particular day of the school year, rather it must become part of the daily work life of educators. Joyce & Showers (2002) outlined that the traditional view of teacher’s work is governed by the idea that time with students is of singular value, that teachers are primarily deliverers of content, that curricular planning and decision-making rest with higher levels of authority and that professional learning is unrelated to improving instruction. This limited view of teaching does not allow opportunities for teachers to participate in curriculum development, learn and share successful methods of teaching students, discuss comprehensive and efficient ways to implement standards and continue their own learning. Education must respond to the changing needs of students and their teachers. Shanker (1993) pointed out that the employees of the Saturn Automobile Company (in the United States of America) spend 5% (92 hrs per year) of their work time learning – learning to make a better automobile.

### *Professional Learning Needs Active Collaborative Engagement that Leads to Reflective Practice*

Although professional learning needs to relate to individual needs, for the most part, it needs to be organised around collaborative problem solving (Fullan, 1991; Guskey, 1995; Hargreaves, 1994; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Joyce & Showers, 2002). This requires teachers to work together to address areas of common concern. The process of 'learning together' is a popular mechanism that has been outlined in the literature and offers practicing teachers the opportunity to exchange pedagogical knowledge and ideas at school. It allows schools to move from a replication model to a reflective model. Reflective practice provides an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their teaching practices and their impact on student learning. It recognises that there is no one 'best way' in planning educational programmes (White & O'Brien, 1999). The decision-making process needs to respond to a number of features that define the event to be decided. Different situations and thinking styles, different goals and purposes, different motives, different problems and different desired outcomes will result in a choice of different strategies. The purpose of reflective practice is to match the most appropriate decision-making strategy with the current situation. It is therefore necessary to ensure that flexibility is built into the process so that the strategies that are employed truly meet the desired outcomes of the learning community. The notion of teachers working together changes the isolation that is often felt by teachers. Teachers in a learning community work together to share both their challenges and successes. They receive support and learn from one another, developing a shared language in an environment of professional respect, giving them the confidence to change their teaching practices to better support the students' learning needs (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Lieberman & Miller, 2000).

In contrast with the traditional model of professional learning, where the purpose is knowledge acquisition through the transfer of information from 'expert' or 'instructor' to passive recipient, the aim of reflective professional learning is behavioral change and improved performance. Teachers are actively engaged in the learning process through

assisting in establishing the agenda and shaping the process to align with their own professional needs (Hawley & Valli, 1999; Lieberman & Miller, 2000). This notion can be summarised as:

Professional development today also means providing occasions for teachers to reflect critically on their practice and to fashion new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy, and learners (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995, p. 597).

### *Professional Learning Needs to be Ongoing and Supported*

Professional learning opportunities should be continuous and ongoing, involving follow up, support<sup>9</sup> and opportunities for further learning (Fullan, 1993; Meiers & Ingvarson, 2003). Whilst the literature advocated for school-based learning, there will be times when teachers need to enrich their own ideas and knowledge with experiences that may be gained from outside sources (Lieberman, 1995). New knowledge and information will be needed in any learning environment to ensure that the organisation continues to improve. Huberman (1995b) argued that if teachers are to effect changes in teaching practice, then teachers must participate in activities that combine work that is internal to the school, with interactions outside the school.

### *The Content of Professional Learning Must Come from both Research and Practice*

#### *Using both Inside and Outside Knowledge*

The literature indicated that teacher's growth and knowledge comes about in many ways. Teachers do learn from outside knowledge such as workshops, speakers, research and books, however, they also learn from each other, from looking at student work, from helping

---

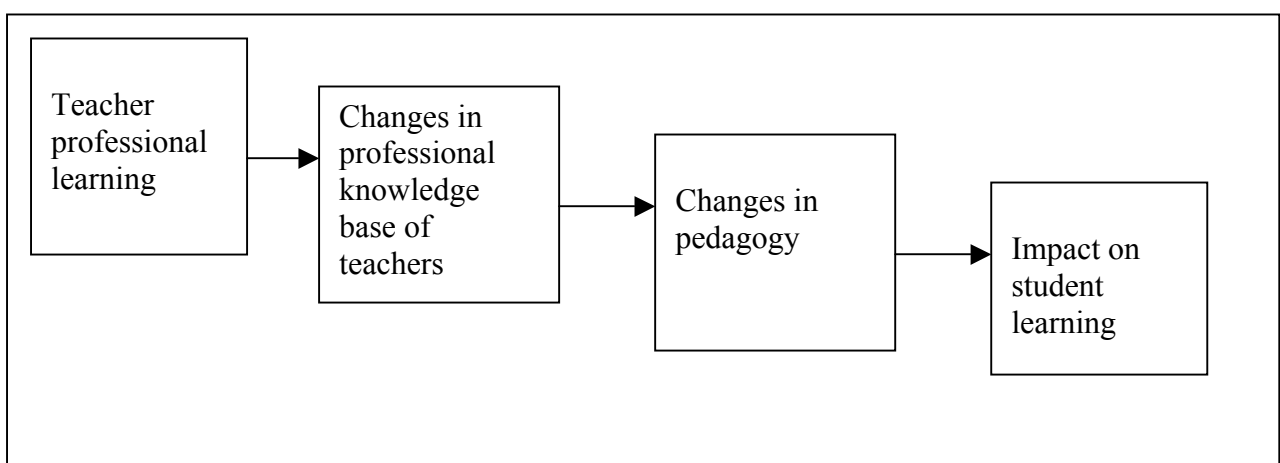
<sup>9</sup> Support in this context refers to the support that can be given to teachers at a 'school level'. This could possibly include practices such as coaching, mentoring and teaming.



to shape assessment tools and from examining their own practice. The increasing body of literature where teacher knowledge is put alongside researcher knowledge (Lieberman & Miller, 2000) suggested that this kind of professional learning will change the way that schools and educational organisations think about the delivery of professional learning programs and the organisations that support it.

It is essential for schools to create a context for teacher learning that includes internal work for teachers with external consultations and/or expertise. Schools in this process are seen as professional learning communities that have developed partnerships and networks with universities and other educational authorities (Braham, 1995; Corcoran, 1995; DuFour, 2004; Hargreaves, 1994; King, 1999; Lieberman & Miller, 2000; Senge, 2000; Stoll et al., 2003). The content of the professional learning must come from inside and outside the learner, and from both research and practice. Professional learning opportunities must honor the knowledge of the practicing teacher as well as draw on research and other sources of expertise outside schools and classrooms. Artful professional learning design effectively combines theory and practice (Loucks-Horsley et al., 1998).

This section explored the literature that outlined the elements of effective professional learning. In the next section, a model of school based professional learning to implement religious education, as outlined in GNL, is articulated. The model that was developed is based around the logic proposed by Supovitz (2001) that quality professional development will produce superior teaching in classrooms which, in turn, will translate into higher levels of student achievement. This theory is represented in Figure 2.5.



*Figure 2.5. Model of professional learning theory as outlined by Supovitz (2001).*

### Articulation of a School Based Professional Learning Model

From the literature, a school-based model of professional learning was developed. This model was based on the inside/outside model as articulated by Hoban (1977). Within this model, knowledge is derived from teachers' own experiences and from outside 'expertise' (Hoban, 1997; Lieberman, 2007; Lieberman & Miller, 2000). Figure 2.6 outlines the model to be implemented.

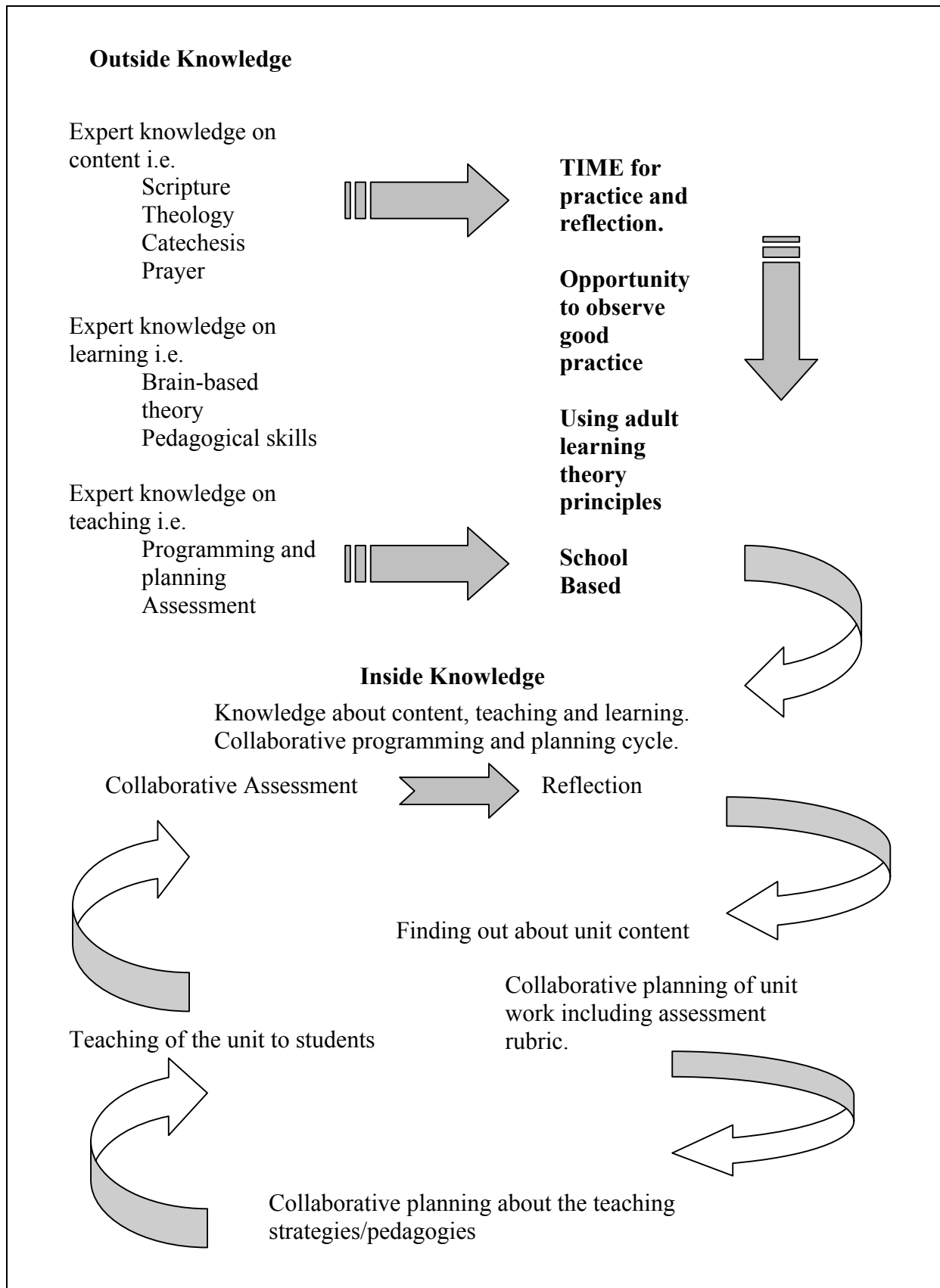


Figure 2.6. Model of school-based professional learning to be implemented. This model was implemented prior to phase two of the data gathering process.

The inside knowledge component of professional learning was to take place at the school site. Participants worked within their collaborative planning teams: Kinder/prep teachers; Gr. 1 & 2 teachers; Gr. 3 & 4 teachers; Gr. 5 & 6 teachers. While the outside knowledge component could have been conducted at the school site *or* an alternative site, the implementation of this model was conducted at the school site. The school had previously organised teachers into planning teams and a variety of professional learning activities had been undertaken with staff to ensure that there was a common understanding of collaborative structures within programming, planning and expectations. The following procedure was then followed:

- Participants within the study agreed to the focus area of study within the professional learning model. The unit of work was identified and the expected student outcomes were identified.
- Once the area for study had been identified, participants decided on the expertise and/or outside knowledge that was needed to ensure that all members of the group could plan the teaching and learning sequence to ensure that the student outcomes could be met.
- A timeline was developed. This included inviting outside expertise such as the CEO education officer and parish priest to talk to participants, participating in meetings to plan learning sequences and assessment tasks<sup>10</sup> and finally, participating in collaborative assessment processes using a protocol.

## Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature pertaining to professional learning. First, it critiqued the historical models of professional learning as outlined by Hoban (1997). Second,

---

<sup>10</sup> During the first phase of the study participants planned units of work based on the common assessment tasks that were written by personnel at the CEO. During the second phase participants developed their own tasks and assessment rubrics.

influences on professional learning were discussed. These influences included a discussion on the image of teacher learning, teachers and educational change, school improvement and professional learning, schools and professional learning communities, research on teaching and learning and higher standards of expectations for student achievement. Third, design characteristics of professional learning were explored. These included professional learning, with student learning at the core, the role of testing and assessment, the curriculum content, teaching and learning, professional learning as site-based and involving teachers. Furthermore, the characteristics of effective professional learning design identified that learning takes time and adult-learning theories should be taken into consideration, as well as the fact that it needs collaborative engagement to lead to reflective practice. It identified that professional learning should be ongoing and supported and comes from theory, research and practice. It needs inside and outside knowledge.

Finally, these effective design characteristics were used in the development of a school-based professional learning model for the implementation of GNL. This model was implemented into the school's teaching and learning program and provided the focus for this study. The following chapter explains and justifies the research design that guided the empirical research.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### Introduction

Chapter three provides the framework of the empirical research component of the project. It outlines and justifies the epistemological position of the research, the theoretical perspective, methodology and methods that were used. It describes how and why the research was conducted, discussing the processes of data generation and analysis.

Social research was chosen as the theoretical paradigm for the research proposal. The specific field of investigation was the professional learning of teachers in a particular school within the archdiocese of Hobart. The Catholic Education Office implemented new religious education guidelines (GNL) within its schools, and the teachers who took part in the research were using these guidelines to inform their planning of units of work. Various professional learning opportunities were organised for teachers by the Catholic Education Office and these opportunities included ‘outside-in’ models of professional learning. In addition to these learning opportunities for teachers, the researcher implemented into the school’s teaching and learning program, the model of professional learning as developed within the literature review of this thesis. The aim of the research reported in this thesis was to develop theories from the data provided by the teachers, as they reflected on their professional learning in religious education. The following research questions were explored:

1. To determine teacher perceptions of the characteristics of effective professional learning in religious education.
2. To determine what factors associated with professional learning in religious education, teachers perceived as influencing their professional growth.
3. To determine teacher perception of professional growth in religious education and its impact on student outcomes.

## Theoretical Paradigms

Social research was chosen as the theoretical paradigm for this research. The specific field of investigation was the professional learning of teachers within a particular school, within the archdiocese of Hobart. The vast array of literature on research indicated that all research has a number of elements, including epistemologies, theoretical perspectives, methodologies and methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 1). Table 3:1 presents a matrix that illustrates the choice of epistemology, theoretical perspectives, methodology and methods used in this study.

*Table3: 1: Overview of the Research Design*

Epistemology	Constructivism
Theoretical Perspective	Symbolic interactionism
Methodology	Grounded Theory
Methods	Questionnaire Interviews (structured /unstructured) Group discussion/interview (structured/ unstructured) Classroom observation Collaborative assessment of student work

## Epistemological Foundations

Research methodologies imply understandings about the nature of reality. These beliefs shape how the researcher sees, interprets and acts in the world. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) stated that all research is interpretive as it is guided by “a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied” (p. 19). Crotty (1998) stated that epistemology is a way of understanding and explaining “how we know what we know” (p. 8) and “it is concerned with the nature, sources and limits of knowledge” (Klein, 2005, p. 1). It attempts to answer the basic question, “What distinguishes true knowledge from false

knowledge?” (Heylighen, 1993, p. 1). According to Crotty (1998), there are three epistemological perspectives. These perspectives include objectivism, constructivism and structuralism.

Objectivist epistemology holds that meaning and meaningful reality exists. In this view of knowledge, the objective truth can be discovered by research. This “derives from the principle that human knowledge and values are objective: they are not created by the thoughts one has, but are determined by the nature of reality, to be discovered by man’s mind” (Rand, 1982, p. 1).

The constructivist perspective rejects this view, arguing that objective truth or reality is not independent of human thought and meaning. It is out there waiting to be discovered and constructed or built up by individuals and communities (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Crotty, 1998; Heylighen, 1993, 1997). Constructivist theorists expect their research participants to take an active role in the inquiry, design and dissemination of data (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

The third epistemology as outlined by Crotty (1998) is structuralist. The structuralists “aim to isolate real structures rather than suggest hypothetical laws” (Gluckmann, 1974, p. 139). From the constructivist’s perspective, subjects and objects are seen as partners in generating meaning, whereas in structuralism, meaning is not constructed within the interaction between object and subject. Rather, it exists independently of this interaction (Crotty, 1998). Furthermore, structuralists reject the notion “ that facts present themselves in their true light, and so perception is not the correct way to acquire knowledge” (Gluckmann, 1974, p. 140). For the purpose of this study, the structuralist viewpoint was rejected, as knowledge was to be created from participant perception.

This qualitative study was carried out within a constructivist epistemology. The professional learning experiences of teachers were constructed within a specific framework



(Crotty, 1998). Reality was constructed, changed and interpreted through the experiences of teachers within particular professional learning activities (Crotty, 1998). This knowledge existed only as the teachers themselves constructed it. The teachers themselves, therefore, constructed reality and meaning.

### Theoretical Perspective

#### *Symbolic Interactionism*

The decision to locate this study within the framework of symbolic interactionism was based on the assumption that all human action is meaningful. “It is the process of interaction in the formation of meanings for individuals”, as thought of by Herbert Blumer (cited in Nelson, 1998, p. 1). According to Blumer (1986), symbolic interactionism rests on the analysis of three premises:

Firstly human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them... Secondly, meanings of such things are derived from, or arise out of the social interaction one has with one’s fellows. The third is that these meanings are handled in and modified through an interpretive process. (Blumer, 1986, p. 2)

Symbolic interactionism is concerned with “the social world, the world as interpreted or experienced, rather than the physical world” (Bowers, 1989, p. 38). Consistent with this interpretive approach, symbolic interactionists examine the understanding of the meanings that create and are created by interaction between human beings in their everyday lives and activities.

From the symbolic interactionist’s perspective, all social organisations consist of actors who develop definitions of a situation, or perspectives, through the process of interpretation and who then act in terms of those definitions. While people may act within the framework of an organisation, it is the interpretation and not the organisation that determines action (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 15).

Symbolic interactionism places value upon the linguistic and other symbols in communication and interaction because of the complex network of relationships within which

that communication takes place. This network would include the role of the researcher (Crotty, 1998). In the context of this study, with the role of the researcher as Principal also participating in the process of professional learning, it was a helpful methodology. According to Denzin (1992) the theory of symbolic interactionism rests on three basic assumptions. First, what we know as social reality is “sensed, known and understood as a social production” (p. 5). Second, human beings are capable of “engaging in minded self reflective behaviour” and thirdly, “humans interact with one another”, and this “interaction is symbolic because it involves the manipulation of symbols, words, meanings and languages” (Denzin, 1992, p. 5). Symbolic interactionists are therefore interested in the every day lives of humans and how they construct and interpret their social world. This study assumed that knowledge is socially constructed and that the meaning derived from that knowledge may be subjective, situational, multiple, diverse and not universal (Charon, 2001). The involvement of a number of teachers who worked together, during professional learning underlined the social nature of the meaning that was constructed.

This study used the insights gained through symbolic interactionism in order to ascertain a common understanding from teachers about professional learning in religious education. It would have been possible to use only a survey instrument to gather this data, however the researcher did not believe that this type of data would add significantly to the analysis that was needed to determine effective models of professional learning. Teacher understanding and learning from professional learning opportunities were explored through the interview process. These were deconstructed for analyses and followed up with classroom observations and discussions during collaborative assessment tasks.

## Methodology

### *Introduction*

Methodology is concerned with the plan of action that underpins the use of the selected research methods (Crotty, 1998). The study focussed on the professional learning of teachers of religious education. It relied on perspectives of teachers who were involved in implementing new knowledge and teaching strategies within their classrooms. An exploration of the literature revealed grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000, 2006; Crotty, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as the most suitable method of research for the study. Grounded theory method provided the means of exploring participants' experiences and gaining their understandings of professional learning. It must be noted that this research is not a grounded theory study per se. Although themes emerged from the data and these were explored, they were not explicated in terms of their properties and dimensions. Grounded theory approaches were used in the data analysis.

Grounded theory is a general method of research that is an alternative approach to the previously popular methods of developing theories that were not explicitly linked to the field of the actual research (Charmaz, 2000). The term 'grounded theory' was attributed to a general method for developing theory that is grounded in data and systematically gathered and analysed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The following section provides an outline of grounded theory and its application to this study.

### *Grounded Theory*

Grounded theory was first developed in the work titled, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, by Glaser & Strauss (1967). It was further developed by Glaser (1992; 1998) and Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998). The theory has been given both effectiveness and

credibility, following the reformulated versions. Grounded theory was initially presented with a threefold purpose (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). First, it offered a rationale for theory that is generated from the data collection phase during research studies. Second, it included guidelines for the method to be used and third, it aimed to provide a method that assisted the legitimisation of carefully executed qualitative research. Grounded theory was presented as a general method for the systematic and comparative analysis of documents, notes and interviews by the continual coding and comparing of data to produce theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory is a “general theory of scientific method concerned with the detection and explanation of social phenomena” (Haig, 2003, p. 1) As such, it is a method well suited to a qualitative approach (Charmaz, 2000, 2006; Glaser, 1998; Haig, 2003).

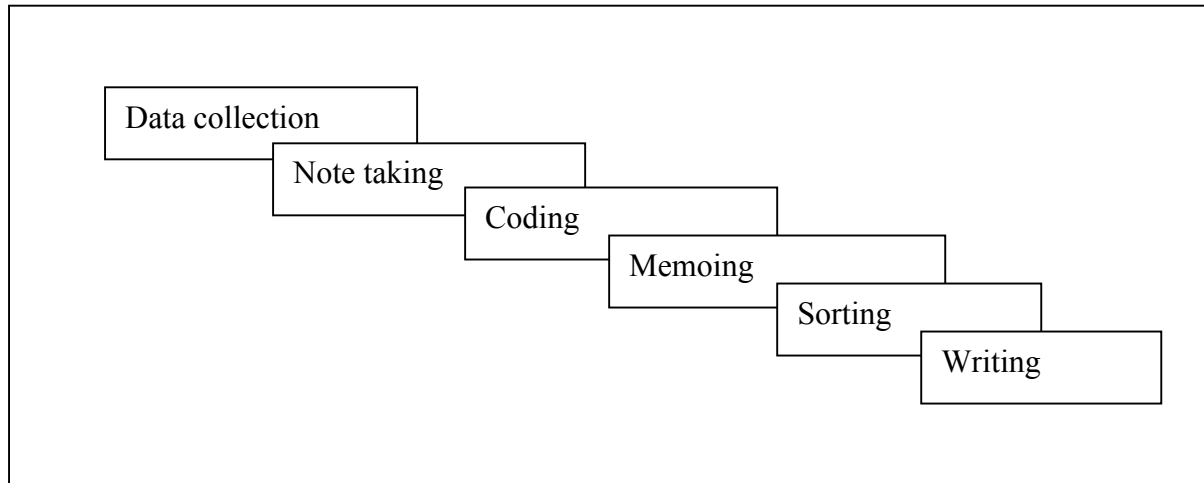
Throughout the research process, grounded theorists develop analytic interpretations of their data to focus further data collection, which they use in turn to inform and refine their developing theoretical analyses. (Charmaz, 2000, p. 509).

Since its introduction by Glaser & Strauss (1967), the method of grounded theory has been applied by many other researchers and theorists and has therefore undergone progressive developments. Many qualitative researchers have claimed the use of grounded theory methods to legitimise their research (Charmaz, 2000). “The rigor of grounded theory approaches offers qualitative researchers a set of clear guidelines from which to build explanatory frameworks that specify relationships among concepts” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 510). The distinctive feature of grounded theory is the development of theory throughout the process of the research. It focuses on the development of substantive theory by achieving relationship between categories in a coding and analytical process of conceptual density. The conceptual density is achieved within systematic procedures that relate to data generated during the process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Through the constant comparison, analysis and systematic conceptualisation, grounded theory enables the researcher the freedom to compare data from

theoretical sampling, to generate categories and properties and to discover main concerns or issues of the participants (Glaser, 1998, p. 98).

Figure 3:1 indicates the phases of grounded theory used in this research.



*Figure 3:1. Phases of grounded theory*

It is important to note that these phases are mostly overlapping and constant comparison is at the heart of the process. It is also essential for the researcher to be able to tolerate a sense of confusion or unknowing to allow theories to emerge and resist forcing the data to reveal preconceived issues that are more the researcher's concerns, as opposed to those of the participants. To limit the tendency to force data, Glaser (1998) suggested that the researcher noted experiences or perspectives that may bias the research as part of the memoing process. Theories are generated as increasingly more data is analysed.

Grounded theory as a methodology of research enables the researcher to explore ways in which symbolic interaction gives meaning to the study. The methodology has sufficient structure to get to the centre of the study, and yet enough flexibility for the research to proceed supported in its process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The challenge for the grounded theory researcher is the achievement of balance between involvement and engagement and the distance and objectivity necessary to produce research without making the topic lose credibility (Charmaz, 2000).

### *Grounded Theory Used as the Research Methodology*

This study used grounded theory to develop theories about the professional learning of teachers in the field of religious education. The approach enabled the researcher to focus on the phenomenon of professional learning in religious education, which forms a small part of the larger role of Catholic Schools. The study used selected procedures for data generation and analysis to develop and inductively derive grounded theory about professional learning (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

By engaging grounded theory as the research methodology, the study developed substantive theory, rather than generating formal or comprehensive theory (Dey, 1999). The referent base was the context in which the study was located, namely the school in which the researcher was Principal. Though the grounded theory that was generated was applied to the particular school context that was studied, it was intended to have suitable generalisability that would enable it to be applied to a variety of other similar school contexts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

## Methods

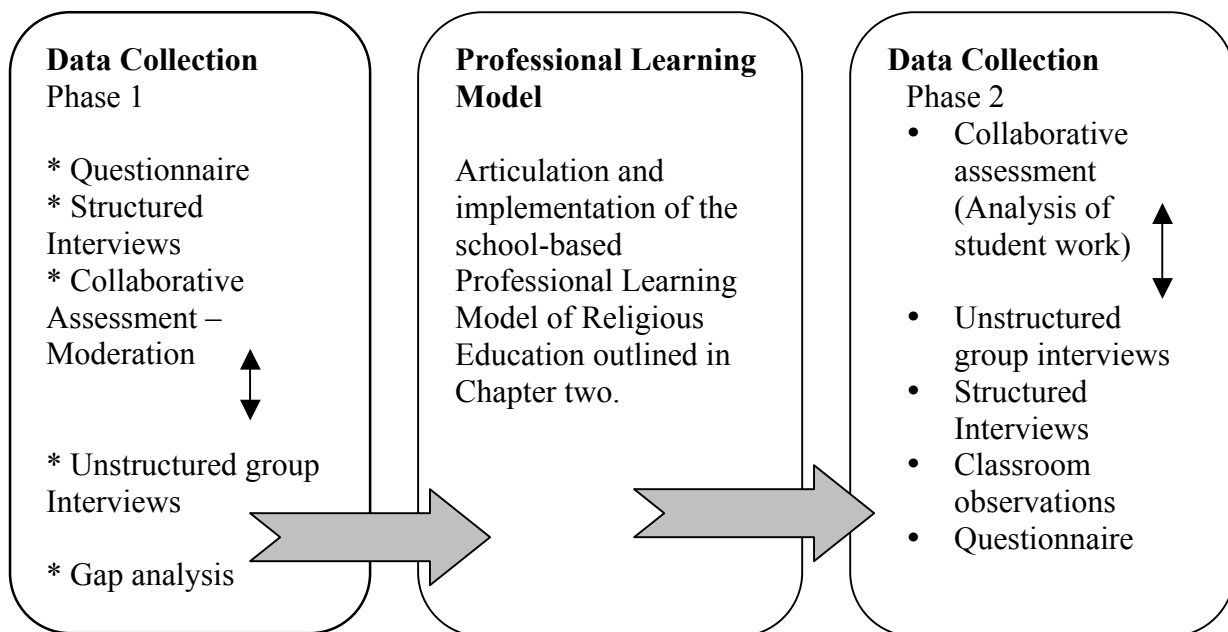
### *Data Collecting Strategies*

Prior to beginning the formal data gathering procedures, permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Director; Catholic Education, and a university ethics application was completed and approved (see Appendices 1 & 2). The methods of research undertaken for this study included a questionnaire, structured and unstructured interviewing,

group interviewing, classroom observation and collaborative assessment and analysis of student work.

The research used two phases of data gathering. During the first phase, data was gathered following the implementation of GNL. Extensive reading across the field of literature (c.f. Chapter two) with a particular focus on the principles of effective professional learning strategies for teacher in-servicing and, more particularly, in religious education, saw the formulation of a school-based professional learning model through a process of analysis and reflection that included the phases as outlined in the grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and the sorting and re-sorting of statements and ideas to identify the common ideas and concepts that appeared to be of significance to the study. The data that was generated was processed and critiqued by colleagues at the school level, in addition to colleagues within the system at a regional level. During this phase, various concepts from the model were trialled within the school as other programs were implemented into the teaching and learning program (i.e. Literacy and Numeracy Programs).

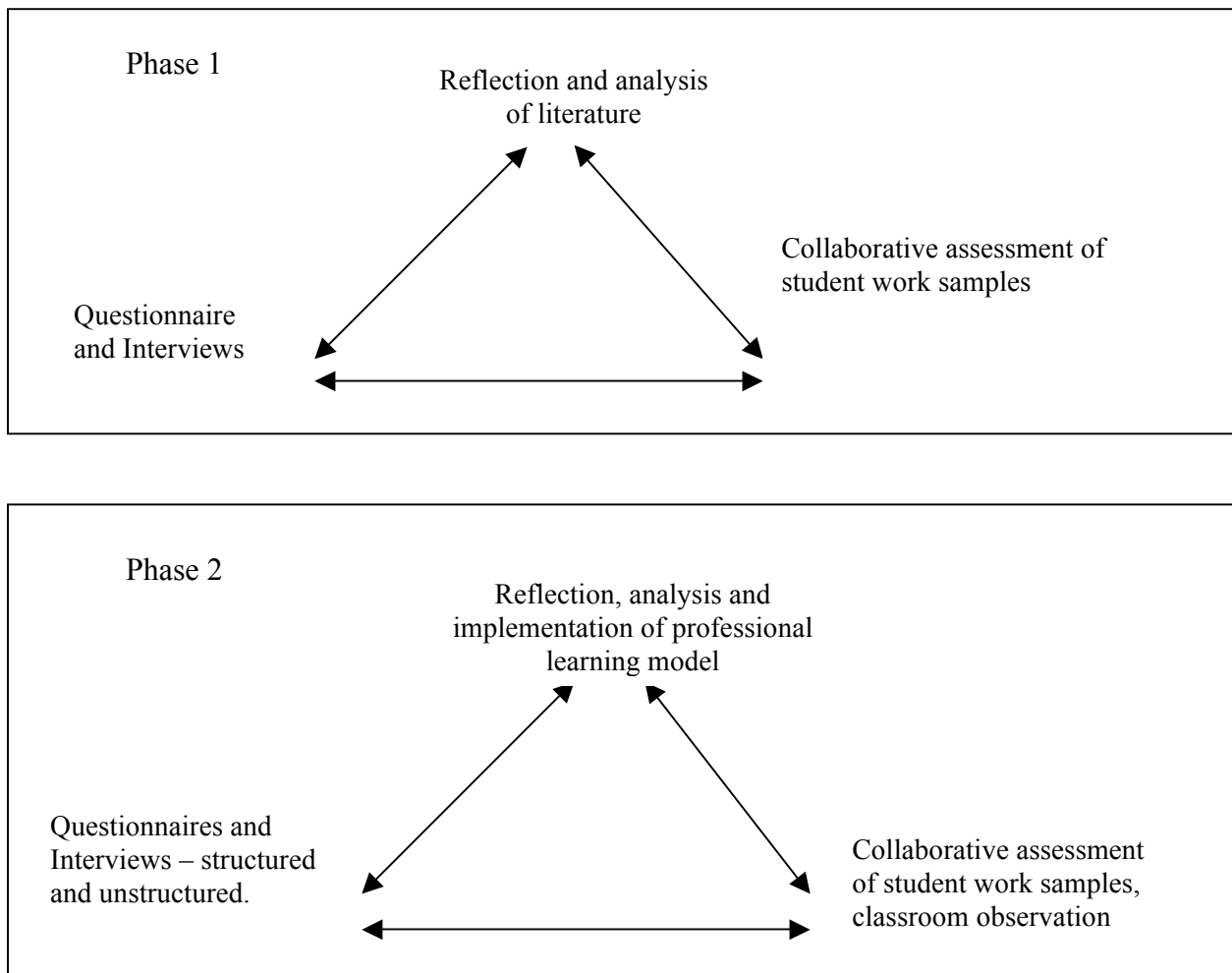
Using the data gathered in phase one, the model was further critiqued and then implemented into the religious education program. Following this implementation, phase two data was gathered. Figure 3.2 outlines the data gathering process used in the study.



*Figure 3.2. Data gathering process*

The use of the data gathering techniques ensured that data analysis continued to evolve and be articulated throughout the various stages of the project. The methodology of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) allowed for the variations that influenced the articulation of the professional learning model. Together with this ongoing analysis, the researcher gathered and analysed the data, as part of a triangulation process, as shown in Figure 3. 3. In this way it was possible to address the issue of validity.





*Figure 3.3. Triangulation process*

### *Data Gathering*

#### *Questionnaire*

The teachers were given two questionnaires throughout the data gathering process. An initial questionnaire was administered during phase one of the data gathering process and a second questionnaire was administered toward the end of the second phase (see Appendices 3A & 3B). Denzin & Lincoln (2000; 2003; 2008) described questionnaires as a method of collecting data in which the interviewer directs the interaction with the participant and introduces ideas into the research process. The questionnaires used in the research were given to participants face to face as this method of administration traditionally has the highest response rate (Fowler, 1993).

The initial questionnaire was used to gather data about the feelings teachers were experiencing in implementing the new guidelines. Teachers had previously participated in various professional learning activities and the questionnaire was used as an instrument to gather information regarding teachers' feelings about the changes that were being implemented into the religious education teaching program. The teachers completed the questionnaire a second time, following the implementation of the professional learning model towards the end of the second phase of the data gathering process. The implementation of the professional learning model took approximately one term (twelve weeks). Both questionnaires were administered during a staff meeting time. Prior to completing the questionnaires, teachers were given a brief outline of the professional learning opportunities and changes to the religious education program to date. Teachers were given the opportunity to complete the questionnaire on two occasions, prior to and after the implementation of the professional learning model. It was then possible to compare their feelings before and after the change. This made it possible to analyse the results of the teachers' feelings before and after the implementation of school-based professional learning. The researcher recognised that as Principal of the school in which the research was conducted, there was a possibility that participants would tell the researcher what they believed the researcher wanted to hear, as opposed to their true feelings on particular topics. To avoid this, the researcher asked another member of the school leadership team to oversee the administration of the questionnaires, and they were assured that their responses would be reported anonymously to the researcher.

A version of Townsend's (2005) model of "Emotions associated with change questionnaire" was used with permission (See Appendices 3A & 3B). Part one of the questionnaire explored emotions associated with the change. In phase one this included exploring the emotions of teachers in implementing GNL. Teachers were asked to think about

the change that had been implemented and then indicate their feeling or emotion towards this change. Figure 3.4 outlines the first question, which explored the emotions of purpose and confusion.

<p>If you have not felt either feeling much or have felt them pretty much equally, circle the '0'. If you have felt one side of the continuum, circle the number that indicates the extent of your feeling. For instance a '1' (or '-1') would indicate a slight tendency to feel this way, whereas a '4' or ('-4') would indicate the you felt this way most of the time.</p> <p>1. Has it been clear what the purpose and direction of change has been or have you been confused about where it was going?</p>										
Purpose	4	3	2	1	0	-1	-2	-3	-4	Confusion

*Figure 3.4. Example of questionnaire.*

The second part of the questionnaire asked teachers to think more fully about their feelings within the change process. They were asked to list the three most dominant feelings that affected them over the course of the change, and what contributed to their feelings. Figure 3.5 outlines the emotions that were explored in the questionnaire.

The following emotions were explored:		
Purpose or Confusion	Knowledge or Anxiety	Support or Resistance
Resources or Stress	Progress or Hesitation	Participation or Exclusion
Consideration or Anger	Humour or Anger	Excitement or Agitation
Passion or Apathy	Trust or Guilt	Compassion or Fear
Equity or Patronage	Integrity or Suspicion	Satisfaction or Frustration

*Figure 3.5. Emotions explored in the questionnaire*

The literature associated with transformational leadership (Townsend, 2005) indicated the importance of building shared values and commitment to the change process. Therefore, in implementing a new professional learning model, the researcher believed that exploring the feelings of the teachers who were to implement the change was necessary before the model was implemented. This information was then analysed and the data generated

informed the re-articulation and implementation of the model and, therefore, phase two of the data gathering process.

### *Interviews*

Within this study, interviews were used alongside other forms of data collection. Fontana & Frey (2008) noted that the interview technique was often used as a source of information, “with the assumption that interviewing results in a true and accurate picture of the respondents’ selves and lives” (p. 120). Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) provided what the researcher sought, namely, the possibility of engaging with teachers to access their understandings and perceptions of their own professional learning.

The literature on interviews indicated that there are a variety of classifications, types or forms of interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Burgess (1982) suggested that if interviews were on a continuum, then you would have “structured interviews at one end and unstructured at the other” (Burgess, 1982, p. 107) The research design used both structured and unstructured group interviews to determine the effectiveness of professional learning opportunities for teachers of religious education. The researcher recognised that as Principal of the school in which the research was conducted, her own biases, interests and work related responsibilities could influence participants to be reserved or reticent about disclosing their real perceptions on the model of professional learning in the interview process. Therefore, a variety of data gathering techniques were used in the interview process in an attempt to overcome this. These processes are outlined in the following section.

#### *Structured interviews.*

In a structured interview the researcher asks all the respondents the same series of predetermined questions in the same order and there is very little flexibility in the way in

which the questions are asked (Fontana & Frey, 2008). The interviewer, using this particular technique, plays a neutral role. The researcher used this particular technique during both phases of the study. The use of this technique gave the participants an opportunity to see the questions prior to the interview. The interview questions are provided in Appendix 4. This technique allowed for little dialogue, or for the researcher “to improvise or exercise independent judgement” (Fontana & Frey, 2008, p. 125). In an attempt not to stress or influence the participants, the researcher used the scheduled teacher-principal conferences to conduct the structured interviews.

#### *Unstructured interviews.*

According to Fontana and Frey (2008), structured interviews aim at “capturing precise data of a codable nature so as to explain behaviour within pre-established categories”, whereas unstructured interviews “attempt to understand the complex behaviour of members of society without imposing any *a priori* categorisation that may limit the field of inquiry” (p. 129). The aim of the unstructured interview was to gain knowledge and understanding from the teachers’ perspective of the professional learning in which they were participating, and the implications that this had for their teaching practice. The unstructured interview allowed the researcher to understand the teachers’ perspectives in their own words (Burgess, 1982; Fontana & Frey, 2000). Therefore, interviews provided the data used to develop the theory regarding the effectiveness of professional learning activities. As the unstructured interview did allow flexibility within the process, a checklist was developed by the researcher to ensure that insights gained from the teacher were relevant and consistent with the research aims (see Appendix 5 for a copy of the research checklist). In a further attempt not to influence the participant responses, and to ensure that participants did not feel too reticent about disclosing

their real perceptions, the unstructured interviews were held in group situations (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975) .

### *Collaborative assessment*

To collaboratively assess student work, two professional learning structures known as ‘protocols’ were introduced. A protocol consists of agreed guidelines for a conversation (Blythe, Allen, & Powell, 2008). The protocols used in the research included the ‘Collaborative Assessment Conference’ (Allen & Blythe, 2004) and the ‘Tuning Protocol’ (Blythe et al., 2008). These two processes were taught to teachers during staff meetings. The first process known as the ‘Collaborative Assessment Conference’ (Allen & Blythe, 2004) was used to learn more about the strengths and needs of a student, in addition to reflecting on the classroom teaching pedagogies used within the planned unit of work. The second process known as the ‘Tuning Protocol’ (Blythe et al., 2008 ) was used to explore the instructional practices of teachers by focussing on the work and assessment tasks that students had completed.

Looking at student work has the potential to expand teachers’ opportunity to learn, to cultivate a professional community that is both willing and able to inquire into practice, and to focus school-based teacher conversations on the improvement of teaching and learning (Little, Gearhart, Curry, & Kafka, 2003, p. 192).

The use of the two protocols allowed the research to focus on the work that teachers and students did every day in their classroom, to determine whether student outcomes improved. The questions that guided the examination of student work included questions about the quality of student work, about the teaching practice, about students’ understanding, growth and intent (Blythe et al., 2008). The two protocols, the collaborative assessment conference and the tuning protocol are now outlined.

*Collaborative assessment conference.*

The collaborative assessment conference, was first developed by Seidel (1998a, 1998b) and colleagues at Harvard Project Zero. Since its development it has been used for various purposes:

To hone participants' ability to look closely at and interpret students' work, to explore the strengths and needs of a particular child, to reflect on the work collected in student portfolios, and to foster conversations among faculty about the work students are doing and how to support that work (Blythe et al., 2008 p. 39).

The collaborative assessment conference provided a structure to help group members look together at a piece of student work, to determine what it revealed about the student and what the student was working on and learning. It then considered the implications of that student's work for teaching and learning. The structure for the conference evolved from three key ideas; a) Students complete open-ended tasks as opposed to work sheets. The problem or assignments can be developed or assigned by the teacher or developed by the student. Thus, the piece of work has the potential to reveal information about task mastery and the student; b) The analysis of student work is an opportunity to look closely at student work, as opposed to looking at what teachers hope and expect to see; and c) teachers need the perspectives of others, particularly those who are not familiar with their classroom contexts and/or students in order to see what the student work may reveal and to help generate ideas about how to use this information in teaching practice (Blythe et al., 2008 )

*Tuning protocol.*

The Tuning Protocol was first developed in the early 1990's by McDonald and his colleagues, as a means for the five schools who were part of the 'Coalition of Essential Schools' Exhibitions Project' in the USA to receive feedback from each other and 'fine tune' their student assessment techniques (Blythe et al., 2008). The purpose of the discussions was

to help teachers share their students' work and their own work with their colleagues. To take part in the tuning protocol, teachers collect samples of their students work. Figure 3.6 outlines the purposes, the role, the presentation of the context for the student work, and the kinds and amounts of work typically shared during the process of the 'Collaborative Assessment Conference' and the 'Tuning Protocol' (Blythe et al., 2008) that were used in the study.



	Collaborative Assessment Conference	Tuning Protocol
Purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To learn more about students' goals and interests: the problems and issues they choose to focus on in the course of an assignment.</li> <li>• To learn more about the strengths and needs of a particular student.</li> <li>• To reflect on and gather ideas for revising classroom practice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To develop more effective assignments, projects and assessment tasks.</li> <li>• To develop common standards for students' work.</li> <li>• To support teachers' instructional practice through focussing on student performances and how they are assessed.</li> </ul>
Role of description, interpretation, and/or evaluation.	<i>Primarily description, with some interpretation.</i> The process asks participants to describe the student's work, to ask questions about it, and to speculate about the problems or issues in the work that the student was most focussed on.	<i>Primarily evaluation.</i> The process asks participants to provide warm and cool feedback on student work samples and teachers' assignments, scoring instruments and so on.
Presentation of the context for the student work	<i>Context withheld until the middle of the process:</i> The presenting teacher does not describe the context for the work until after participants have looked carefully at it and formulated questions about it.	<i>Context presented initially:</i> At the beginning of the session, the presenting teacher typically provides descriptions of the assignment, scoring criteria and so on.
Kinds and amount of work typically shared	<p><i>Kinds of pieces:</i> most often used to look at student work generated by an open-ended assignment as opposed to worksheets. The work can come from any subject area.</p> <p><i>Number of pieces of work:</i> Usually one or two pieces of work from a single student. May also be used with multiple samples from a single student.</p>	<p><i>Kinds of pieces:</i> most often used for looking at work from a single assignment, task, or project. Samples of work usually include written and visual pieces. And sometimes a brief video as well.</p> <p><i>Number of pieces of work:</i> Typically used with work from several students, often at different levels of accomplishment. May also be used with a single sample.</p>

Figure 3.6. Processes used for looking at student work. Protocols as outlined by Blythe et al., 2008 p. 34).

### *Classroom Observation*

Classroom observation was used as a data gathering instrument to observe the behaviour of the teacher and the students in order to develop an understanding of the interactions that took place that influenced student achievement (Hook, 1981). Classroom observation involved the observation of religious education lessons with a purpose. Cartwright & Cartwright (1974, p. 3) defined observation as “a process of systematically looking at and recording behaviour for the purpose of making instructional decisions”. The literature indicated that a distinction can be made between interpretive methods, often referred to as unstructured methods, and analytical methods, also known as structured methods of observation (Hook, 1981). This study focussed on using structured methods of observation.

The focus of the classroom observation was to further explore the themes that were generated from the data gathered following the interview process and the earlier collaborative assessment protocols. The following questions were generated and used in observation:

1. How appropriate is the level of instruction?
2. What is the progress of a particular student within the unit of work that is being taught?
3. How much co-operative on-task behaviour occurs between individual group members?
4. What kinds of questioning strategies do teachers use in the classroom?
5. How involved are the students in the lesson?
6. What are the students learning about the topic?

The researcher was aware that as Principal of the school, her presence in the classroom could possibly influence classroom discussion. To minimise this influence, four classroom visits prior to the research investigation were conducted. It was not possible to focus on all questions in the classroom observation and as the researcher was particularly interested in finding out if teaching techniques/pedagogies were changing and teachers were beginning to use the questioning techniques that involved higher order thinking. Following discussion with

teachers, it was decided that the focus for the observation would be on teacher and pupil talk. In particular, the focus on teacher talk would include the observation of teacher questioning.

To gather this information, an adapted version of the Flanders' Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC) was formulated (Hook, 1981). This technique uses an observation instrument for the analysis of classroom talk (Hook, 1981). It used,

Many systems for coding spontaneous verbal communication, arranging the data into a useful display and then analysing the results in order to study patterns of teaching and learning (Flanders, 1970, p. 28).

The instrument relied on a three-second time sampling. The observer decided which category best represented the behaviour observed over three seconds. The categories included teacher talk and student talk (see Appendices 5A, 5B, 5C). Figure 3.7 provides an example of the responses in the pupil talk category.

#### **Pupil Talk**

##### *Response*

Pupil-talk response. Talk by pupils in response to teacher. Teacher initiates or asks pupil statement or structures the situation. Freedom to express own ideas is limited.

##### *Initiation*

Pupil-talk initiation. Talk by pupils, which they initiate. Expressing own ideas; initiating new ideas; freedom to develop opinions and a line of thought. Like asking thoughtful questions; going beyond the existing structure.

*Figure 3.7. FIAC (Hook, 1981). Pupil talk*

To gain further information on the questioning technique used by teachers, and the accuracy of student answers, a tally system was used. Figure 3.8 provides an example of the direction and type of teacher questions.

Pupil	Knowledge	Comprehension	Application	Analysis	Synthesis	Evaluation
A						
B						
C						
D						
E						
Etc.						

*Figure 3.8. Teacher question response sheet*

To note the accuracy of pupil responses the following symbols were used:

- + Correct;
- p partly correct;
- wrong;
- 0 no answer.

#### *Observer influence in classroom behaviour.*

Little research evidence was available about the effect of the observer in the classroom on the behaviour of the students or the teacher (Hook, 1981). However, from practice, the researcher was aware that the presence of another adult in the classroom especially if the adult watches and walks around the room taking notes or if the adult is an authority figure, the behaviour of both the students and the teacher are influenced. The researcher was aware of this influence. However, as it was not uncommon for the Principal to be present in classrooms, every effort was made to limit this influence.

Probably the best advice for anyone observing in a classroom is to blend into the background and be as unobtrusive as possible in the way observations are made and recorded, thereby enhancing the likelihood that the behaviour of those observed is natural and not contrived (Hook, 1981, p. 54).

To conduct the research, an appropriate time was negotiated with the class teachers. In all instances of classroom observation the teachers appeared relaxed. At the conclusion of the lesson, the researcher spoke with the teachers. Two of the teachers indicated that they felt nervous, but relaxed after a short time. The researcher willingly shared the observation notes with the teachers.

### How the Research Was Conducted

#### *Participants*

The aim of the study was to know and understand from the teachers how the professional learning they had experienced influenced their teaching, and then in turn, how this influenced the learning outcomes of the students.

The study was conducted within a particular school of which the researcher was Principal. This school was an urban systemic school, within the Archdiocese of Hobart. The school population included 480 students from Kindergarten to Grade 6. The school has a total teaching staff of twenty-five. Of the twenty-five teachers, only twenty teach religious education and therefore were invited to participate in the study. Of the twenty teachers eligible to participate in the study, eighteen agreed to do so. The research was outlined to teachers during a staff meeting. Teachers who agreed to participate were asked to complete the consent form shown in Appendix 6. To ensure that teachers did not feel pressured or coerced into agreeing to participate, a member of the Leadership team led this task. This met with the request outlined by the Director of Catholic Education, Hobart (see approval letter, Appendix 1).

In addition to teaching grade levels and religious education, teachers have other areas of responsibility within the school. Table 3.2 outlines the participants and their positions of responsibility within the school. Please note that some participants held more than one area of responsibility within the school, such as Grade 3 teacher and Religious Education Co-ordinator.

*Table 3.2. Participant areas of responsibility*

Classroom teacher, Early Childhood (Kindergarten – Grade 3)	11
Classroom teacher, Primary (Grade 4 – Grade 6)	6
Assistant Principal (Teaching and Learning)	1
Co-ordinator (Religious Education)	1
Positions of responsibility (Other subject areas)	1

The range of teaching experience of the participants ranged from less than five years to twenty years or more. Six participants were teachers with less than five years experience. This is particularly significant in that these teachers were not teaching before the new

Guidelines (GNL) were first introduced, and therefore had never used any other teaching material for the teaching of religious education in their classrooms. The remaining twelve participants had been teaching between ten and twenty or more years. This indicates that a significant number of teachers were involved in teaching religious education using the previous religious education curriculum, the Melbourne Guidelines (Archdiocese of Melbourne, 1984). Of the eighteen participants, nine participants had used both the 1984 and the 1995 editions of the Melbourne Guidelines (Archdiocese of Melbourne, 1984; 1995) to inform their teaching of religious education. Table 3.3 indicates the teaching experience of participants.

*Table 3.3. Teaching Experience*

Less than five years	6
5-10 yrs	0
10 – 15 yrs	5
15 – 20 yrs	3
20 + yrs	4

The participants were asked to indicate the teaching qualifications that they had achieved. This was completed to gain an insight into the attitudes towards continued professional learning. Table 3.4 identifies the teaching qualifications achieved by participants.

*Table 3.4. Teaching Qualifications*

Teaching Certificate	3
Diploma of Teaching	5
Bachelor of Education	8
Graduate Diploma of RE	2
<i>Presently studying</i>	2
Graduate Diploma (Other discipline)	2
<i>Presently studying</i>	1

Masters of Education	1
<i>Presently studying</i>	1
Doctor of Education	0
<i>Presently studying*</i>	1

\* This does not include the researcher

### *Accreditation*

Table 3.5 outlines the number of participants who had received accreditation or provisional accreditation to teach religious education.

*Table 3.5. Accreditation to teach religious education.*

Completed Accreditation (30 points)	11
Given provisional accreditation (working towards 30 points)	7

The number of participants involved in the Graduate Diploma of Religious Education and studying towards gaining their 30 points towards provisional accreditation was a reflection of the Catholic education system's commitment to providing teachers with formal qualifications to teach religious education. The system policy now indicates that all teachers teaching RE must apply for accreditation. If teachers teaching RE do not have sufficient points to gain accreditation then 'provisional' accreditation is gained. Once provisional accreditation has been approved, teachers have approximately four years in which to gain full accreditation. Participating in various systemic approved courses or completing the Graduate Diploma in Religious Education can achieve full accreditation.

### *The participants*

Table 3.6 identifies the age range of participants.

*Table 3.6. Age range of participants.*

20 -25	2
26 – 30yrs	2
31 – 35yrs	3
36 – 40yrs	0
41- 45yrs	6
46 – 50yrs	0
50+ yrs	5

The table suggests that 38% of participants were aged between 20-35yrs and 61% were aged between 41 and over. For the research project, this would indicate that there was a balance of ages, suggesting there was a balance between youth, maturity and experience. Of the participants, there were four male and fourteen female.

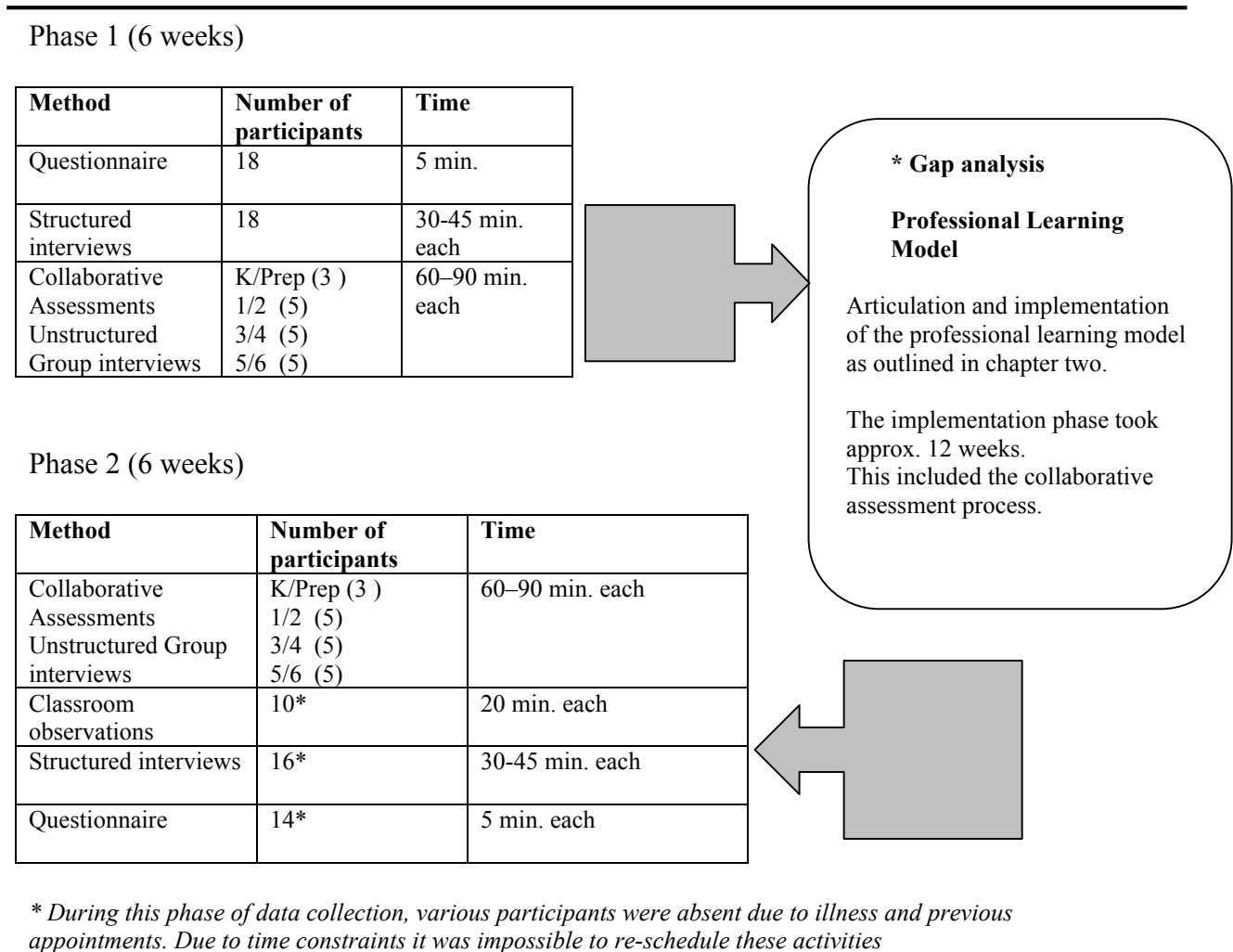
The majority of participants were female and over the age of 40. The majority held an undergraduate degree and some had achieved a Graduate Diploma or Certificate to update their teaching qualifications to obtain teacher registration. The majority had continued with some formal education to complete the accreditation process.

### *Conducting the Research*

The research was conducted over two phases, with the first phase taking place over a six-week period. Following the first phase the professional learning model that was articulated from the literature review was refined. This model was then implemented into the religious education learning and teaching program. The implementation took approximately 12 weeks (one school term). This included the collaborative assessment protocols, which began phase two of the research. This phase of data collection took approximately six weeks.



Figure 3.9 outlines the phases of data collection and the order in which the data was collected.



*Figure 3.9. Phases and time of data collection*

### *Questionnaires*

Of the twenty teachers that were eligible to participate in the research eighteen teachers chose to take part. Eighteen questionnaires were completed during the first phase and fourteen during the second phase of the data gathering process. The questionnaire was completed anonymously. The first questionnaire was administered during the initial data gathering process and a second questionnaire was administered toward the end of the data

gathering process (see Appendices 3A & 3B). Both questionnaires were administered during a staff meeting time. Prior to completing the questionnaires, teachers were given a brief outline of the professional learning opportunities and changes to the religious education program to date. Teachers completed the questionnaire on two occasions making it possible to compare their feelings towards the change prior to the implementation of the professional learning model, and then again after the implementation. The discrepancy in the number of questionnaires completed can be attributed to attendance at the staff meeting.

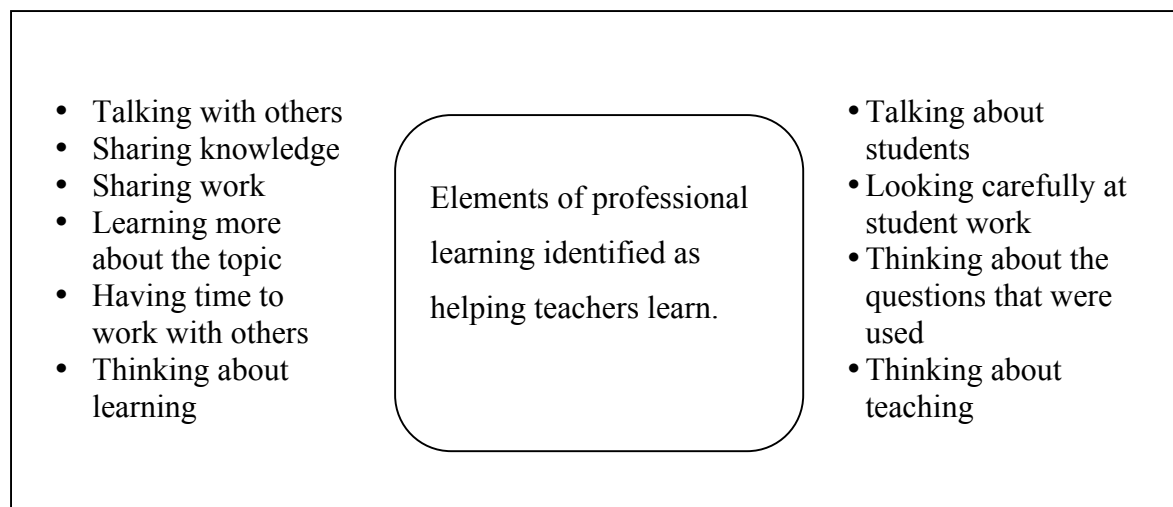
### *Structured Interviews*

The structured interviews during phase one and two were timetabled, and took between 30 - 45 minutes in duration. Eighteen teachers were interviewed during phase one and sixteen during the second phase. Questions during the structured interviews (see Appendix 4) included asking teachers to:

- identify the elements of the professional learning that they believed helped them to teach more efficiently
- identify their own preferred learning styles
- identify elements that they believed may have helped them personally on their own faith journey.
- identify how their learning helped and influenced their teaching
- identify what professional learning may have influenced the learning of their students.

Each structured interview was taped and then transcribed. The information was then analysed and sorted. Colour coding was used to sort the information within each of the questions. The transcripts were used as a checking process to limit researcher bias, as well as ensuring that any previous knowledge of the researcher had not been used. This process ensured that the

principles of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) were used, as the issues emerged from the data (Glaser, 1998). Figure 3.10 is an example of the data that was generated.



*Figure 3.10. Example of data generated from a structured interview*

### *Unstructured Group Interviews*

The group collaborative assessment using the two protocols formed the basis of the unstructured group interviews. As the collaborative assessment was an element of the professional learning model, teachers were already working in their grade level groups. This opportunity was used to conduct the group interview. Table 3.7 indicates the number of participants and the time taken for the protocol and interview in phase one and Table 3.8 indicates phase two.

*Table 3.7. Phase one, unstructured group interviews*

<b>Year levels</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Example of topics discussed</b>
Kindergarten/Prep	3	40min	Assessment task - relevance
Gr. 1 & 2	4	60min.	Teaching scriptural unit – length of teaching unit
Gr. 3 & 4	4	60min	Assessment activity. Teaching of parables to year level
Gr. 5 & 6	3	50min.	Knowledge base of grade level – comparison of gospel stories Lack of content knowledge by teacher.

*\* Due to illness, four participants were unavailable to complete this phase.*

*Table 3.8. Phase two, unstructured interviews*

<b>Year Levels</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Example of topics discussed</b>
Kindergarten, Prep Gr. 1 & 2	8	90min	Unit content. Knowledge of children's abilities Standard of work Ability of students Teaching skills. Pedagogies used. Assessment and rubrics
Gr. 3, 4, 5 & 6	8	90min	Unit tasks Teaching skills Ability and knowledge of students Standard of work Assessment and rubrics for scoring

*\* Two participants were absent during this phase, due to prior engagements and illness.*

To participate in the protocols, teachers were asked to bring two pieces of student work. The participants gathered in a circle and a facilitator for the group was nominated. The presenting teacher showed the group members the sample of student work. The facilitator started the discussion and ensured that the guidelines and agenda for the protocol were followed. The protocol specified that time is allotted for different purposes which included asking a focussing question. Following the protocol, there was time for teacher debriefing and reflection. Table 3.9 outlines the questions that were pursued following the use of the protocol as part of the interviewing process.

*Table 3.9. Reflecting on the Process: Taken from ‘National School Reform Faculty’ (Buchovecky, 2000).*

---

*Looking for evidence of student thinking:*

- What did you see in the student’s work that was interesting or surprising?
- What did you learn about how this student thinks and learns?
- What about the process helped you to see and learn these things?

*Listening to colleagues thinking:*

- What did you learn from listening to your colleagues that was interesting or surprising?
- What new perspectives did your colleagues provide?
- How can you make use of your colleague’s perspectives?

*Reflecting on you own thinking?*

- What questions about teaching and assessment did looking at students’ work raise for you?
  - How can you pursue these questions further?
  - Are there things that you would like to try in your classroom as a result of looking at this student’s work?
- 

Evaluation formed an integral part of the professional learning process. This process was applied at the end of phase one, allowing for the model of professional learning to be re-articulated and implemented at the beginning of the second phase. The evaluation process used for professional learning was derived from the work of Guskey (2000) and Killion (2002). Specific goals and priorities for student learning were identified and used as the basis for professional learning. Guskey (2000) recommended thinking of evaluation in terms of five interdependent levels or states of questioning. The five levels identified included teachers’ reactions, teachers’ learning, organisational support and change, teachers’ use of knowledge and skills and student learning outcomes.

The professional development learning approach featured the backward design, as outlined by Wiggins & McTighe (1998), which is familiar to teachers in curriculum development. This approach includes starting with the end in mind and setting specific goals

or standards for student learning (Killion 2002). This evaluation was therefore completed using a modified version of Tallerico's (2005) gap analysis. Table 3.10 outlines the process.

*Table 3.10. Gap analysis (Tallerico, 2005, p. 12).*

<b>Step 1</b> Examination of student work	What do we know? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect and scrutinise information</li> <li>• Focus data by sorting, coding and grouping</li> <li>• Display summaries</li> </ul>
<b>Step 2</b> Sort by selected subgroups	What else can we discern? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distinguish subsets of data meaningful to the topic being studied.</li> <li>• Group data</li> </ul>
<b>Step 3</b> Note predominant patterns	Where are the gaps? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discern themes and differences</li> <li>• Identify gaps in student learning</li> </ul>
<b>Step 4</b> Infer targets for adult learning	What additional adult learning can help? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritise student learning gaps</li> <li>• Deduce root causes</li> <li>• Translate into goals for professional learning</li> </ul>

## Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the epistemology and theoretical framework underpinning this study of the effective professional learning strategies of religious educators that positively impact on student learning. The foundations for the empirical research component of the study were located in the field of social science. The study drew upon symbolic interactionism as the theoretical perspective and utilised the methods of structured and unstructured interviews, questionnaire instruments and classroom observation to examine the perceptions of religious education teachers who had participated in professional learning activities. The data that was collected was interpreted according to the principles of grounded theory. Chapters four and five provide an analysis and discussion of the data collected using the research design outlined in this chapter.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **ANALYSIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THEORY: PART ONE**

#### **Introduction**

Chapters four and five present the analysis of data and theory that was generated during the two phases of the research project. As noted in Chapter three, a grounded theory approach (Glasser & Straus, 1967) was used to determine the themes and perceived key understandings of professional learning that characterised effective professional learning in religious education and, consequently, influenced teacher learning to effect decision-making within the classroom context.

During phase one, teachers participated in a variety of professional learning activities that were organised by the Catholic Education Office (CEO) and the school's Religious Education Co-ordinator (REC). The activities included attending in-services, workshops and training sessions with 'experts' from Universities and the CEO. The activities organised by the school's REC included collaborative programming, planning and assessment. Phase one also included collecting data over a six-week period. The data collection instruments included questionnaires, structured interviews, collaborative assessments and unstructured interviews. Evaluation formed an integral part of the professional learning process. The evaluation process used for professional learning was derived from the works of Tallerico (2005), and has been outlined in Chapter three of this thesis. This process was applied at the conclusion of phase one following the initial sorting, coding and classification of data. This evaluative methodology allowed for a second model of professional learning to be articulated and implemented at the beginning of the second phase. Specific goals and priorities for student learning were identified and used as the basis for professional learning. The school's professional learning plans were amended to reflect the needs as outlined. The new plan was implemented and the second phase of data collection occurred. The second phase of data

collection also included using questionnaires, structured interviews, collaborative assessments and unstructured interviews, and this is outlined and analysed in Chapter five. To support the findings and proposed arguments, direct quotations have been used from the interview transcripts. To ensure the anonymity of the participants, alphabetical letters (A, B, etc.) have been used. The quotes presented in the research were selected because they were particularly useful in exploring the perceived key understandings. The two opportunities to collect data allowed the researcher to refine the categories and to further explore connections and meanings in the data. The three key questions that guided the research were:

1. What were the perceived characteristics of effective professional learning in religious education, as determined by participants?
2. What professional learning opportunities did teachers report as ‘best supporting’ their professional growth in religious education?
3. Did teachers perceive that their professional growth in religious education influenced student outcomes in religious education, and if so, in what ways?

During phase one, the research focused on identifying the characteristics of professional learning. Five major themes emerged from the data: a) Change and professional learning; b) Content of professional learning; c) Structure for professional learning; d) Contexts for professional learning; and e) Reasons for professional learning.

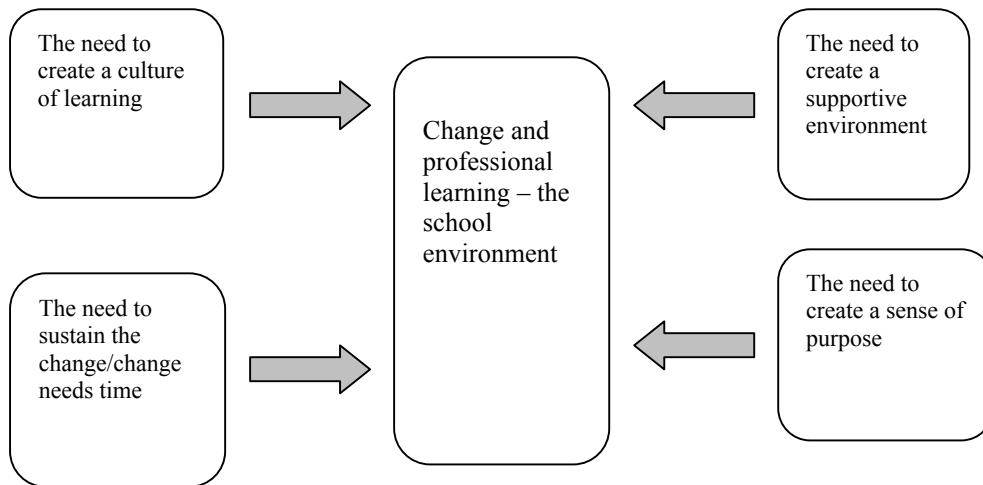
## Theme One. Change and Professional Learning

### *Introduction*

The focus of this research project was the professional learning of teachers implementing GNL for the teaching of religious education. An analysis of the data during phase one indicated that teachers were thinking of ‘change factors’ that were affecting their perception of the implementation.

Figure 4.1 outlines the first theme, change and professional learning and the key understandings that were perceived by teachers as relating to change.





*Figure 4.1. Theme one. Change and professional learning*

### *The Need to Create a Culture of Learning*

Research participants were aware that many changes were occurring within the school and that new guidelines (GNL) for religious education had been published by the archdiocese and were to be implemented into classroom programs. Participants had also recently participated in a school-wide literacy program, and therefore were knowledgeable about many of the professional learning elements, namely, collaborative processes such as moderation, programming and planning. Some participants commented on the need for ‘things to change’ when referring to religious education. The discussion during the interviews and informal discussions highlighted the fact that teachers were aware that they needed to learn, and therefore a ‘culture of learning’ needed to be created.

We know that we have to implement the guidelines and we will, but we don’t like to. Like, we don’t like to change. I mean we have been using the old guidelines<sup>11</sup> for years and we know the guidelines, we know how to teach with them, and we just don’t know the new stuff. And when will we get time to learn what we have to do? We just have so much to do. And when we change we just have to do so

---

<sup>11</sup> The Melbourne Guidelines, 1975; 1977; 1984; 1995 had established a tradition of school-based religious education curriculum in Tasmania.

much more. And everything needs to change, like all the other things we do. Things just need to change (C).

As staff members had previously engaged in professional learning activities that involved a variety of collaborative practices exploring teaching pedagogies in literacy, many were aware that teaching styles and strategies in religious education also had to change to reflect good teaching practice.

In RE we know that we have to do more than what we used to do. Before, sometimes, we could just talk about the topic. It would mostly be teacher talk, and therefore the students weren't really engaged, I suppose (E).

Education in the twenty-first century requires teachers to know more about their students, their subject matter, and the context of their work. There is a growing body of literature that develops this notion of learning and teaching communities (Glatthorn & Jailall, 2000; Haberman, 2004; Lieberman, 2007; Senge, 2000; Sergiovanni, 2000; Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007). Within this 'new model', teachers need to see themselves as learners.

We need to learn new skills, we need to learn new ways that will engage our students in RE so that they enjoy it and learn something. So that they (students) are not just passive listeners (D).

This notion of the teacher as 'learner' is one that has to be adopted in schools. Schools need to ensure that they are places for teachers to learn as well as teach (Corcoran, 1995; Hawley & Valli, 1999). This theme of the 'teacher as learner' is further explored in literature about professional learning communities (DuFour, 2004; DuFour et al., 2005b; 2005c). In the 1990's, much of the emphasis was on 'professional communities' (Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007) and now the word 'learning' appears between professional and community, showing that there has been a shift towards 'learning'. That is, the focus on process has moved towards a focus on improvement (Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007). Collective learning communities depart from the traditional forms of professional development to a context where learning in the community involves people working together towards a common understanding of both concepts and practices (Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007).

It is much better when we do this together, as a team. The team really needs to focus on making sure that the group is learning. We have to learn to make sure that we teach better, so that our students will learn better (D).

A core assumption in this school community was to improve student learning. Hargreaves (2007) stated that a professional learning community should rely on organisational learning, that is the “collective ability of people, in an organization, to learn their way out of trouble” (p. 185) and further, that this notion of ‘shared learning’ is needed to sustain achievement and improvement within the community (Hargreaves, 2007).

Participants identified practices that they perceived as promoting learning.

I like to plan with (partner teacher) I learn a lot from her...I learn more that way sometimes, than going off to do courses... (A).

One of the practices involved ensuring that teacher-learning needs were situated in practice and relationships (Lieberman, 2007).

The research participants were also aware that they had to learn to use the new resource, GNL, in their teaching of religious education. However, just using the new material was insufficient and in implementing GNL, participants came to the realisation that a ‘new pedagogy’ was required.

But we know we have to get the children to participate, it’s not all about just sitting and listening and learning. Children just don’t learn that way. We need to use the methods that we are using in other subjects, in RE. I know that (Teacher I) is already using some good strategies, I have seen him and his children. You can tell the children really enjoy it. We all just need to learn how to use those strategies (E).

Participants, therefore, had to become ‘learners’ to fully implement GNL. Hawley & Valli (2007) concluded that one of the most persistent findings from the research on school improvement is the relationship between school improvement and professional learning, and that without the classroom teacher making the improvements, in reality, even the best plans will not eventuate. For this to happen, the teacher needs to learn. Teacher learning is therefore essential in order to improved student learning.

*To Sustain Change, Time is Needed*

Participants mentioned time and the feeling of a ‘lack of time’, during both phases of the research. Professional learning needs to recognise that teacher learning is a gradual process that can be difficult and takes time (Fullan, 1991). Furthermore the risk of failure is inherent in any change process and can promote feelings of anxiety in teachers. Teachers need time to trial new innovations (Fullan, 1991; Loucks-Horsley et al., 1998). The initial survey indicated that 80% of teachers were anxious at the beginning of the implementation phase. Further interviews and discussions highlighted the following concerns about the ‘lack of time’ experienced:

We never have enough time to really talk about our teaching; we are always too busy at a meeting, trying to do all the other work to get it done (G).

The following comment came as teachers were discussing teaching practices during a professional learning activity. One teacher articulated the frustration felt by the group:

There isn’t enough time to do all the things that we have to do; we don’t have enough time to do anything properly. We just do one thing, and then move on to do something else, nothing gets done properly (J).

The theme of ‘time’ and the need for what was perceived as needing ‘more time’ was also a common theme in the research literature as a feature of an effective professional learning program (Meiers & Ingvarson, 2003; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989; Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007). The researcher concluded that, in addition to needing time to learn new strategies, teachers also need ‘time’ to implement and sustain what they have learnt. Time for experimentation is also essential for teachers when they are integrating and internalising new innovations into their current practices (Guskey, 1986; 2000; 2002).

The anxiety of the participants and the general feeling of being ‘time poor’ was addressed in the evaluation of the professional learning activities prior to the second phase of

data gathering. Hawley & Valli (1999) suggested building time into the school day with the use of 'creative scheduling'. Creative scheduling strategies were used to provide 'time' for teachers and these included scheduling a common planning time, or coordinating the timetable to ensure that grade level teachers had opportunities to work together during the regular school day, thus reducing teacher's contact time with students and providing additional time for professional learning. The staff meeting was also reorganised. The 'managerial' discussion issues were limited to a twenty-minute discussion, and a weekly staff memo was issued. The memo included many of the administrative items that were previously listed on the agenda for the staff meeting. In addition to this, staff agreed to 'professional learning' as the agreed focus for all staff meetings. Staff agreed to stay after school for two ninety-minute sessions, as opposed to one session, which tended to last over two hours. It was believed that more would be achieved in two shorter time spans as opposed to the one time.

Time is needed to implement any program or change, but considerable time needs to be given for a 'significant change to occur' (Fullan, 1991).

Significant change in educational practice does not occur quickly, but rather, it is the result of professional learning programs designed with a three to five year time frame (Hodges, 1996).

This is often unfortunate, as results and evidence of improvement in student achievement is expected immediately. Teaching is a complex task, and time is required for teachers and other educators to test new ideas, assess their effects, adjust their strategies and approaches, and assess again in an effort to reach all students and make learning meaningful. Professional learning, therefore, can no longer be viewed as an event that occurs on a particular day of the school year rather it must become part of the daily work life of educators.

Teachers need more time to work with colleagues, to critically examine the new standards being proposed and to revise curriculum. They need opportunities to develop, master, and reflect on new approaches to working with children (Corcoran, 1995, p. 1).

*The Need to Create a Supportive Environment*

Teaching is often described as an ‘isolated profession’ (Sparks, 1994; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989). The professional learning literature indicated the need to improve relationships within schools (DuFour, 2004; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005a; DuFour et al., 2005b, 2005c) and there is a further consensus within the literature that the school site is the optimal place for learning to occur. The relationships amongst staff members will influence the school’s culture and the culture needs to focus on teaching and learning (Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007). During phase one, participants had opportunities to work in collaborative teams during professional learning activities. In all discussions held with individuals and teaching teams, there was an overwhelming response that teachers enjoyed working with their colleagues. It was described as ‘helping teachers to feel supported,’ ‘more willing to have a go’, ‘learning from each other’. The following comments were recorded during a group interview following collaborative planning and the use of the moderation assessment protocol.

It was getting us to put it into practice and that’s where we are learning from, from doing it ourselves not from someone telling us this is how it should be. And I think that’s how a lot of the professional learning is or how it should be (C).

I think other peoples’ previous experiences, they can help me to plan, they can tell me things they have done and I can incorporate that into different ways of planning. I think hearing what other people have done and other people have helped me out with things, and then I don’t mind having a go (D).

I enjoyed that, and listening to what the other teachers are saying, like we are learning from each other. Like, what they were looking at and the questions they were asking made me think what is expected of me for the future, how can I become a better RE teacher (G).

Tallerico (2005) agreed that collective participation in a supportive environment was an effective feature or characteristic of professional learning: “Collective participation can beget sharing and problem solving around common concerns, goals, students, curriculum, methods, and assessment...” (p. 62).

This need to ensure that the environment is supportive of a culture that will support teacher growth was also highlighted in the work of Joyce & Showers (2002). The importance of designing environments “...from which people grow in ability to grow...” (p.158) is paramount in ensuring that the organisation is promoting and fostering professional learning. Teachers in a learning community work together to share both their challenges and success as they receive support and learn from one another, and gain the confidence to change their teaching practices to better support the students’ learning needs (Lieberman & Miller, 2000; Loucks-Horsley et al., 1998).

Designing professional learning activities at the school level empowers staff to develop ownership of their own learning, in addition to addressing the needs of the school, the students and the teachers (Hawley & Valli, 1999; Joyce & Showers, 2002). The process of professional learning should include the teachers who are participating in the learning. This engagement will increase teachers’ motivation and commitment to learn (Hawley & Valli, 1999). If teachers are not involved in the process and they are denied a contribution to their own professional learning, they tend to become detached and often reject school improvement efforts (Hargreaves, 1995).

In requiring a supportive environment, teachers also talked about the need for continuous support and follow up:

It was good when (V) came in to our rooms for reading activities. She would come in and sometimes watch me take the lesson and offer advice or sometimes she took the lesson and I would watch. Can we do that for RE? Have we got anyone that could come around and support us? (D)

I think we need to learn much more about ....how can we do that? (K)

That just didn’t work, that process wasn’t any good. It did not tell us anything about what the students knew about the topic. What are we going to do now? Is any one coming to support us, or talk about the activities? Do we get to report back, to those who wrote the tasks? (B)

Providing ongoing support has been noted as a necessary requirement for guiding effective professional learning to implement change. Supportive environments should be encouraged and processes such as coaching and opportunities to share and work together should be included (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

### *The Need to Create a Sense of Purpose*

It was evident, during the first phase of data collection, that teachers participating in the research did not have a clear sense of purpose for all the professional learning activities in which they were participating. Participants were aware that the new guidelines (GNL) were to be implemented, but at no time prior to the commencement of the research project, did any one at the system level (CEO) or school level indicate to staff what the process of implementation would include. In discussion with the REC, it was noted that they also had not been informed of the system-wide implementation phase.

The survey conducted at the commencement of phase one indicated that 55% of staff members were confused and did not understand the purpose of the curriculum change. This lack of understanding of the purpose of the curriculum change further indicated that staff members were anxious, resistant, and hesitant. This resulted in 80% of surveyed participants also being apathetic towards the change. Following the initial survey, research participants attended a variety of workshops with CEO personnel, in addition to working together in school planning teams. The interview questions that followed allowed participants to elaborate and reflect on the purpose of professional learning in RE.

Why do you think we are doing professional learning in RE? (Researcher)

RE is our core business, so it's important that we keep up. We need to learn what's new and how to teach (O).

We need to implement the GNL that's mandatory from the CEO and the Archbishop. We could have just got the units and resource banks from the disc or



downloaded them from the web site, but we didn't. We did lots of activities as a staff. You allowed us to do things together, and that's important for me. I like to learn things with other people; I am much better that way (D).

We need to learn about theology and Scripture, I haven't done any RE courses yet, so I don't know a lot, I really only know from when I went to school, but I haven't learnt anything since then, so I don't know much. I was frightened at first, because I thought that I would be the only one, who didn't know, but lots of the others don't know either. They've just been teaching it a lot longer (N).

It's important that we know what we are doing and why. We shouldn't just do things without thinking about them. Just because some else says we should (M).

These comments and others that were collected indicated that all research participants believed that it was important to have a clear sense of purpose when involved in professional learning activities. The questionnaire responses indicated that teachers were apprehensive at the beginning of the implementation phase, however, the evaluation process at the conclusion of the first stage ensured that the purpose was clear to participants prior to the second phase of data collection.

### *Summary of Key Understandings from Theme One*

The Archbishop of Tasmania mandated the implementation of the new guidelines (GNL). Teachers were aware that 'change' would be required with the implementation of new curriculum materials. They were also aware, because of involvement in a school-wide literacy initiative, that change would be required of their pedagogical or teaching skills. As participants became aware of the change process, four key understandings were identified from the data. These key understandings from teacher perceptions included: a) The need to create a culture of learning. This culture of learning is not only concerned with student learning, but must include teacher learning; b) Professional learning needs to occur in a supportive environment, and teachers need to feel supported as they learn new concepts and content and attempt new pedagogies; c) To learn takes time. Time is needed to work together,

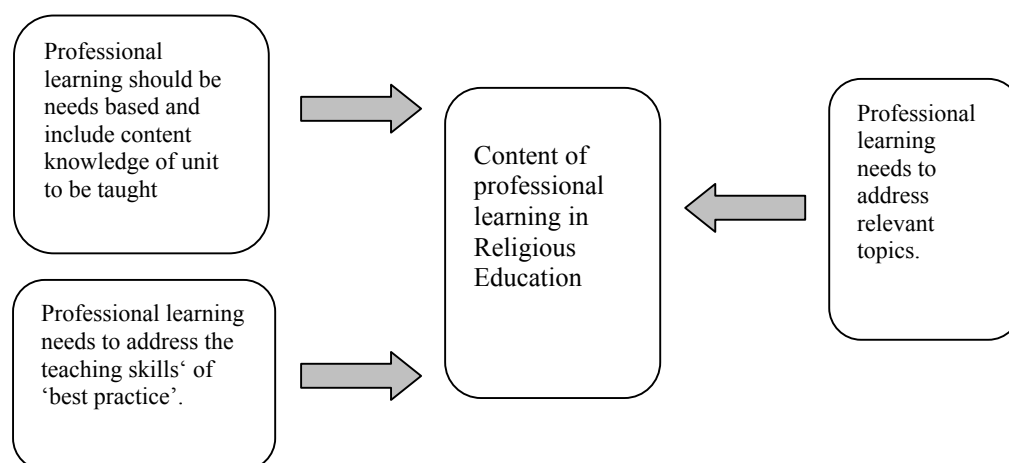
trial new ideas and skills, to share, support and learn from one another, to change teaching practices to better support student learning needs; and d) Professional learning needs to have a clear and focused purpose. Ideally, participants should be involved in this professional learning process, to ensure a sense of ownership.

## Theme Two. The Content of Professional Learning in Religious Education

### *Introduction*

The history of the content of professional learning in religious education in Tasmania indicated that it included opportunities for teachers to attend various workshops and lectures to gain accreditation. In addition to these opportunities, CEO personnel led other workshop activities and programs. Within these programs, the ‘experts’ typically planned the content. These programs may or may not have been held at the school site. In addition to this, CEO support personnel/advisors made themselves available to schools if support in religious education was requested. There was an understanding that all advisors were to work in schools to support the implementation of GNL. Schools were to be visited by their advisor at least once per term. In the majority of instances the advisor would meet with the REC. CEO personnel also supported the formation of RECs by organising network meeting for RECs. These meetings were held on one day each term. The three key understandings from teacher perception that emerged from the data relating to the content of professional learning in religious education included: a) Professional learning activities in religious education should be needs based; b) Professional learning should include best teaching practice; and c) Professional learning should include current and relevant issues that could help participants understand and articulate their own beliefs.

Figure 4.2 outlines the second theme, *Content of professional learning in religious education* and the three key understandings that emerged from the data.



*Figure 4.2. Theme two. The content of professional learning in religious education*

*Professional Learning in Religious Education Should be Needs-Based and Include  
Content Knowledge of the Unit to be Taught*

Seventy-eight percent of research participants, although accredited to teach religious education in a Catholic school, had not completed any formal qualifications<sup>12</sup> that were recognised beyond Tasmania. In responding to the question, “What professional learning do you believe would be helpful in helping you meet the demands of teaching RE?” The participants spoke about various issues:

Mainly ...learning about the new curriculum and what’s in the doctrine (I).

I guess just ideas and strategies and ways to break things down from the bible texts. I would like to see more guidance (K).

All RE teachers probably cover the same 15 or 20 Old and New Testament stories... I would like to know more about how to use them properly...or different ones (M).

---

<sup>12</sup> Prior to 2006, to receive accreditation to teach RE in a Tasmanian Catholic School, teachers were required to complete Accreditation A & B. To receive this accreditation status, teachers were required to complete 30 credit points through the Pastoral Institute in Tasmania. Course units were assigned credit points depending on their duration. This policy was reviewed in 2006 and since this time, teachers need to complete Strands 1, 2.1; and 2.2 to teach RE in a primary school. Although the Accreditation policy does not state how to complete the points required for accreditation, the CEO actively promotes and recommends that teachers complete the Graduate Certificate in RE through ACU, to complete their accreditation. This qualification is recognised in all Australian States.

As responses were so varied and included lists of activities that teachers wanted included, the researcher decided that during the group interview there would be an opportunity to explore this theme a little further. The interview was held in two groups, these being early childhood and primary teachers.

Again, the participants spoke passionately about the various activities that they would like included in a professional learning program. However, for many, these activities were slightly different from the previous lists that had been presented. In exploring this with participants it was explained by one participant as:

It depends; it depends on the unit and how much information and background we have on the unit. If we don't have very much in the resource banks then we need lots of information, if the information is good, then we do not need any PD. But if working together is PD then we need it ...because that helps us ... (M).

Developing professional learning opportunities to suit the needs of individual staff members seems an impossible task, however, collating the needs of teachers following the teaching of a particular unit and asking teachers for their contribution of ideas to professional learning activities could ensure that professional learning opportunities were meeting their needs. Newmann, King & Youngs (2000) claimed that schools that demonstrated the highest student learning outcomes were schools where staff worked collaboratively, sharing common goals, and where staff made significant contributions to decision-making about their work. The notion of teachers controlling their own learning and identifying their own learning needs is a key design principle that has featured in the literature (Andrews & Marian, 2007; Hawley & Valli, 1999). Teachers being involved at this level will ensure that the professional learning activities are relevant to their needs.

*Professional Learning in Religious Education Needs to Address the Teaching Skills  
of Best Practice*

Including the teaching skills of ‘best practice’ in professional learning in religious education was a common theme in the data. Following the introduction of the DEEP pedagogical framework (White, 2004) in GNL, and the literacy project<sup>13</sup> teachers had participated in a variety of professional learning activities. Amongst other aims, these activities aimed to improve teaching skills and increase the repertoire of teaching strategies available to teachers in the RE classroom, to ensure that students were thinking and learning. The following conversation was recorded during a group interview:

P 1<sup>14</sup>: We need people to give us new ideas, new skills

R<sup>15</sup>: What people do you believe could give us new ideas?

P1: People like (W) who did that In-service with us

P2: Or (Y) he gave us some really good activities

R: Do you think that you can learn these skills from each other?

P2: We can practise them together and remind each other, but we need someone to teach them to us in the first place, because we don’t know what they are, or what we are meant to be doing, we need someone to introduce new things to us

P3: Yes, then we can practise them and talk about them together.

It was noted that during the first phase of data collection, although participants constantly referred to ‘best practice’ in religious education, they had not made the link of transferring the knowledge of teaching practices and strategies from other curriculum key learning areas and applying these to the teaching of religious education, giving religious education the academic rigor that is required (Moran, 1991; Rossiter, 1999; Ryan, 1999).

Religious education should be intellectual, critical and empathetic, and avoid reducing the meaning of religious education solely to concern with Church matters or maintenance of Church community (Ryan, 1999, p. 21).

This notion of academic educational rigor for religious education was further developed in GNL, as it outlined a pedagogical approach for teaching, using the DEEP pedagogical framework (White, 2004). The DEEP pedagogical framework includes: *Discernment*: the generation of personal meaning and understanding; *Engagement*: personal choice to be

---

<sup>13</sup> School based and designed professional learning literacy project, 2003-2007.

<sup>14</sup> P denotes participant

<sup>15</sup> R denotes researcher

involved in learning; *Enrichment*: catering for individualised learning; and *Participation*: the communal dimension of learning. These elements of the teaching process were designed to improve teaching which, it is hoped, will improve learning for all students.

The challenge for the religious educator is to engage students, in age appropriate ways, through diverse dialogical strategies with text, rituals, symbols and practices of a tradition to generate critical knowledge created laterally between the individual and the community's texts to assist students (Welbourne, 2004, p. 1).

There is a real need for professional learning programs for teachers of religious education to offer appropriate learning models which may assist them to develop new perspectives on engaging students by incorporating the different aspects of learning: cognitive, affective and spiritual, and the associated processes, perceiving, thinking, feeling and intuiting (de Souza, 2001). Through the various learning opportunities that were made available to teachers throughout the research, teachers had the opportunity to develop a repertoire of pedagogical skills that facilitated their ability to differentiate learning experiences. This caused teachers to reflect on pedagogical strategies that they had found beneficial in other learning areas and apply them to religious education.

### *Professional Learning in Religious Education Needs to Address Relevant Topics*

A third key understanding that emerged from the data in the theme of content for professional learning in religious education was the perceived need to ensure that the content was addressing 'relevant and up to date' topics<sup>16</sup>. As part of the professional learning program, time was provided during staff meetings for professional reading and discussion. Religious articles/topics were chosen and discussions were organised by the REC, to be included in this professional learning time.

---

<sup>16</sup> 'relevant and up to date' topics was defined by participants as topics that were part of GNL, in addition to controversial issues within the Catholic church

Following participation, comments included:

I like the RE reading that we had, but it really didn't have anything to do with teaching. Well, not little kids anyway you might use it in high school, but it helps you to think about things you know to help you work out your own thoughts (K).

I like the reading that we do; they help us to be professionals. In RE we have discussed some controversial topics, this helps when parents or anyone else in the community starts talking to us about them and we need to have an opinion. It has also helped in my study (I).

As teachers in a Catholic school it is important to stay 'up to date' and knowledgeable about the Catholic Church's teachings on a variety of moral, social and ethical issues, in addition to the perspectives and aims of Catholic education (Ryan, 2007). This is not advocating for teachers 'own views' and commitments to hold a prominent place in their teaching, rather their preferred option should be 'committed impartiality' (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006). Teachers therefore, need to understand that their role requires professional commitment to a process of student inquiry, rather an exposition of their own personal commitment.

They will not hide their values, neither will they advertise them. They will try not to let their bias influence the impartiality that should be evident in a fair treatment of different points of view. But it may be helpful for them to alert students to their particular bias so that students themselves can better interpret input from the teacher (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, p. 296).

However, this particular topic was also seen by 22% of participants as not helping in their professional learning. Comments included:

I don't find all that discussion (commenting on the article from 'Inform' RE magazine) very useful. We can't use it in the classroom, I like learning about things that will help my classroom teaching (O).

I like to do things that will help my teaching, but these readings don't really help me much. I can't use them or anything and they make me think... they're probably good topics for a dinner party (L).

The challenge for educators and providers of professional learning is ensuring that teachers do have opportunities to broaden their knowledge in religious education. It is evident from teacher responses (there were four responses, two were positive and two negative) that

teachers do not believe that all professional learning opportunities that have been provided for personal reflection necessarily help their classroom teaching. The challenge will be to engage teachers to reflect on this new knowledge against their own beliefs, experiences and habits. It may also be necessary to ensure that explicit links are made to ensure that teachers see clear benefits between what they are learning and their own classroom situations (Hawley & Valli, 1999).

### *Summary of Key Understandings from Theme Two*

The implementation of new guidelines (GNL) to determine the teaching practice of religious education in Tasmanian Catholic schools meant that teachers participated in a variety of activities to learn new ‘content’. During phase one, CEO personnel and the school’s REC chose the content that determined the professional learning activities. The REC provided opportunities for teachers of religious education within the school to become informed about the content of the resource banks. In addition to this, opportunities were provided for participants to share in professional dialogue relating to ‘religious topics’ as chosen by the REC. The key understandings perceived by participants included what they stated as ‘needs based.’ Participants noted that their learning should address their needs. These perceived needs of participants varied, but many included the ‘need’ to be familiar with the background knowledge and work as outlined in the units, described in the resource banks of GNL. Participants further acknowledged that this learning should also include elements of using ‘best teaching practice.’ The majority of participants did not necessarily make the link during the first phase of data collection that ‘best teaching’ strategies that had previously been learnt in other key learning areas could be transferred to religious education. The third key understanding that emerged within this theme was the belief that professional learning should address ‘relevant topics’. However, the understanding and interpretation of



the word ‘relevant’ was subjective. Although participants used the words ‘relevant topics’, this term could have been used interchangeably with the term ‘content knowledge’.

### Theme Three. Structure of Professional Learning

#### *Introduction*

The third theme that emerged from the data related to the design or the structure of professional learning activities for teachers of religious education. Three perceived key understandings emerged: a) Professional learning should include collaborative structures; this included opportunities for collaborative programming and planning and assessment, and was student focused; b) The need to ensure that adult learning styles and theories are taken into consideration, when planning professional learning activities; and c) The need for professional language and dialogue, and the use of protocols, during professional learning activities. Figure 4.3 outlines the third theme: *Structure and design of professional learning* and the three perceived key understandings that emerged.

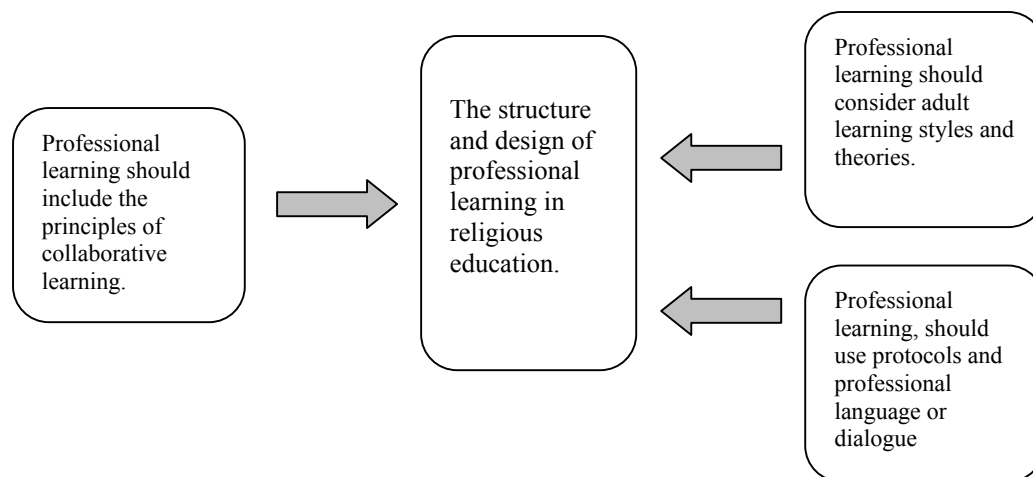


Figure 4.3. Theme three. Structure and design of professional learning

*Professional Learning Should Include the Principles of Collaborative Learning*

The professional learning opportunities organised for teachers during phase one included opportunities for collaboration with peer teachers to plan, evaluate, analyse, assess and moderate student work. This process of ‘collaboration and learning together’ is a popular mechanism of professional learning and offers practising teachers the opportunity to exchange content and pedagogical knowledge and ideas at school. Collaborative problem solving requires teachers to work together to address areas of common concern, with the potential to provide possible solutions (Fullan, 1991; Guskey, 1995; Hargreaves, 1994). Teachers working together can break down the isolation that is often felt by teachers. It is an opportunity to work together to share both challenges and successes. Teachers receive support and learn from one another. Within this environment teachers can gain the confidence to change their teaching practices to better support the students’ learning needs (Lieberman & Miller, 2000; Loucks-Horsley et al., 1998). During phase one, teachers had several opportunities to work together, and these opportunities were organised by the school’s REC. In discussing opportunities for teachers to work together, overwhelmingly, all participant’s responses were positive.

We liked working together, we can learn from each other (J).

It was really good, we got to share what we’re doing, I learnt so much from that (I).

I particularly enjoyed the staff meeting last week, I think that was fantastic. I enjoyed that and listening to what the other teachers are saying about what they were looking at and the questions they were asking made me think about what is expected of me: how can I become a better RE teacher? (I)

Teachers indicated that they wanted to continue the practice.

I hope that we can get more time to keep working and planning together (Q).

This (collaborative planning time) has been really good; I hope we get some time for the next unit (J).

This is really the best, we learn so much about what we have to teach, and we learn that from each other. I hope that we can plan the next topic like this (G).

The opportunity to use collaborative processes has the potential to break down teacher isolation (Bryk et al., 1996), collectively empower teachers (Hargreaves, 1995), create an environment of professional respect (Guskey, 1995) and develop a shared language and understanding of good practice (Little, 1982). “Without collaborative problem solving, individual change may be possible but school change is not” (Hawley and Valli, 1999, p. 141). In a discussion about professional learning, participants reflected on their learning during the implementation phase of a previous project on literacy. 50% of participants argued that during the implementation of the literacy project, they were often asked to change their practice in isolation without any support.

When we first started out learning about literacy, we didn’t work together, we were just doing things on our own, this was really hard and it meant that we were not accountable to one another ...(M).

The literature indicated that without collaborative support, sustained change is rarely achieved.

Without companionship, help in reflecting on practice and instruction on fresh teaching strategies, most people can make very few changes in their behaviour, however well intentioned they are (Joyce & Showers, 1995, p. 6).

Collaboration has the potential to affect teacher motivation and commitment; however collaboration in itself is not enough. Collaborative cultures also need to ensure that they are focusing on the right things. Teachers need to ensure that the collaboration is about learning and improving the learning (Fullan, 2001).

Collaborative cultures, which by definition have close relationships, are indeed powerful, but unless they are focusing on the right things they may end up being powerfully wrong (Fullan, 2001 p. 67).

The literature, however, did not outline what this collaboration might be like for professional learning. The collaborative structures that were put in place for professional learning during the first phase included some of the structures that had been used in the previous literacy project. During phase two, the research participants were asked to identify

collaborative structures that they believed would be useful in their ongoing professional learning (see chapter five).

*Professional Learning Should Use Adult Learning Theories and Principles*

Research participants had to learn new content and pedagogies to implement new religious education guidelines (GNL) into their religious education teaching programs. Adult learning, however, is different from student learning (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b). The initial questionnaire indicated that participants were hesitant about the curriculum change and did not feel that they had been included in the process. All participants indicated that they felt excluded from the process and they felt ‘angry’ with the way that curriculum changes were affecting them. In subsequent interviews the following was recorded:

I liked using the Guidelines<sup>17</sup>; I don’t know why we had to change (L).

I don’t know why we had to have new Guidelines they<sup>18</sup> just keep changing things (E).

Opportunities were made available for participants to attend professional learning activities that were organised by ‘outside personnel’. These ‘workshop’ activities were held at the school, but no one at the school was able to contribute to the development of activities. The following was recorded after teachers had participated:

I don’t know why all our PD is about sitting and listening. We wouldn’t do it to our students, why do they do it to us? (D)

I don’t think I learnt anything that I could take back to the classroom (L).

These statements indicated that participants gained little from the sessions that had been attended. During phase one, there were school-based opportunities for collaborative

---

<sup>17</sup> Previous Guidelines used for the teaching of religious education were the Melbourne Guidelines.

<sup>18</sup> In using the word ‘they’, the participant was referring to personnel from the CEO.

programming and planning. When participants had the opportunity to actively engage in the professional learning process comments included:

It was good that we were able to work together; this really helps our teaching (L).

We are able to work together, this means that we can learn from each other (C).

Planning and working together means that we are not on our own, it is so much easier (E).

This attitude of not feeling like a participant in the learning process continued to be evident throughout phase one. The collaborative assessment tasks were developed by CEO personnel and then administered to students by teachers. Teachers participated in the moderation process at a school level, and the REC participated at a 'system level'.

This assessment task could have been a good one. I think we<sup>19</sup> developed a really good teaching unit around the task. However, the assessment rubric didn't match what we had been trying to teach, so therefore we couldn't do the assessment properly. I don't know why we weren't involved in the planning of the tasks and assessment rubric (G).<sup>20</sup>

The assessment task didn't tell us anything about what the children knew about the topic. The guidelines said that we shouldn't talk to the children about what they were doing, but I found it necessary, so that I would know what the children know. I don't think that this activity provided us with anything. I don't know how we can do state moderation on this (B).

It was evident that teachers did not believe that their knowledge or experience were taken into consideration during the first phase of the implementation process.

When considering adult learning theories, it is important that the knowledge and experience of participants is considered (Knowles et al., 1998). It was evident that, during phase one, adult learning theories and principles were not considered. When developing activities, instructional approaches should be varied enough to accommodate the different styles and intelligence of the adult learners (Gardner, 1995, 1999). Another principle of adult learning theory outlined by Knowles et al. (1998), to guide effective professional learning is

---

<sup>19</sup> The teacher, together with a teaching team of four peers developed the unit.

<sup>20</sup> Teachers were able to make these comments about the RE tasks and assessments, as they had previously been involved in writing the units and common assessment tasks that were used for moderation in English writing.

to ensure that adults have the opportunity for self-directedness, to shape what and how they learn. These principles were used when designing the activities outlined in phase two.

*Professional Learning Should Use Protocols and Professional Language or Dialogue*

Professional dialogue refers to the conversations held between teachers to inform their planning, teaching and assessment of student work. In education circles, the word ‘protocol’ has also evolved. A protocol is commonly known as a guided conversation, which provides structure to enable educators to learn more about teaching and learning (Allen & Blythe, 2004). Like doctors, educators benefit from consultation with colleagues. In the teaching profession, student work provides some of the critical data and cases that allow professionals to work together to make the best possible decisions for their students (Blythe, Allen & Powell, 2008, p.5).

Protocols consist of agreed upon guidelines for a conversation, and it is the existence of this structure, which everyone understands and has agreed to, that permits this kind of conversation to occur. Teachers are not in the habit of having this kind of conversation (Blythe et al., 2008).

Protocols are the vehicles for building the skills and culture necessary for collaborative work. They provide teachers with a set time and forum for individual and group reflection on student work, student learning and their own teaching (Blythe et al., 2008 p. 6).

During phase one, all teachers participated in moderating samples of student work. A protocol was used for this task.

It was good to follow the instruction of the protocol, it meant that we had a pattern to follow; we weren’t just waffling on and talking about a lot of other things. We were asking some really good questions (F).

The protocol helped to focus our talking and questions – otherwise we tend to go off on all tangents (A).

The conversations that develop around protocols are not the conversations that teachers usually have, and looking at student work is usually not completed by anyone except perhaps the class teacher, the student and the parent. The notion of teachers collaboratively assessing and monitoring student work, to comment on, raise questions about it or learn from it (Blythe et al., 2008) is not commonly part of professional learning programs. The protocol creates a structure that makes it safe for teachers to ask challenging questions of each other.

During the first phase of data gathering the participants used the moderation protocol as a method of collaboratively assessing student work. The common assessment tasks for RE were prepared by personnel from the CEO and then given to teachers. Teachers were expected to plan units of work based on the task, teach the units and give students the task to complete at the end of the unit. At a school level, teachers were asked to moderate the tasks that were completed by students. Teachers were given common grading criteria, but no standards were constructed. The purpose of using the moderation process was unclear, as ‘standardised assessment’ was impossible without standards.

In discussion with CEO personnel, as to the ‘purpose’ of the state-wide moderation exercise, the response received was, ‘improved professional learning’. If the purpose was to have more structure for teacher conversation during staff meetings or in team planning times, or requesting that teachers reflect on what was happening in their classrooms, these goals may have been accomplished. However, the process of moderation implies more than this. This thesis does not include a review of the procedure for the implementation of the statewide moderation program or the implementation of the GNL, therefore further discussion holds little relevance. Chapter five outlines the tuning protocol that was used during the second phase.

### *Summary of Key Understandings from Theme Three*

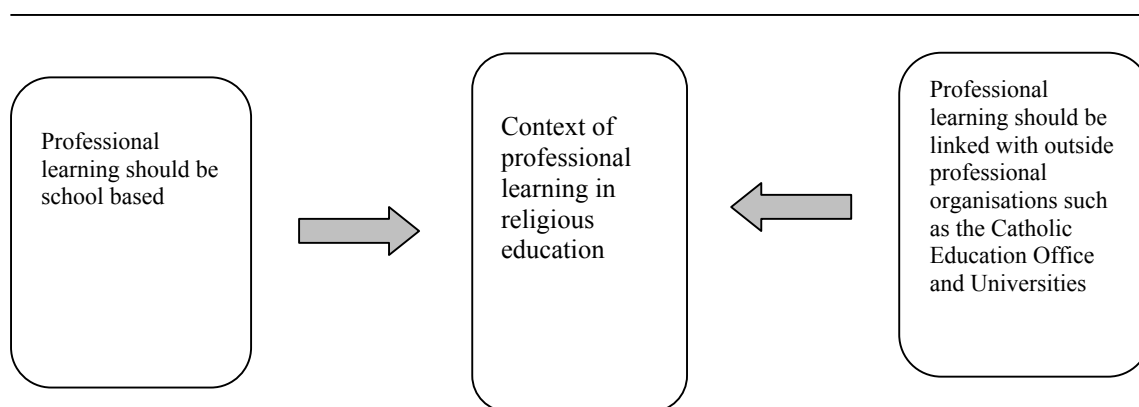
The third theme outlined the content of professional learning and the three key understandings that emerged from the data. The CEO organised and coordinated the content of many of the professional learning activities, workshops and in-services in which the teachers participated during phase one. Some collaborative learning opportunities, such as planning, programming and moderation were organised by the school's REC. Three key understandings as perceived by the teachers that emerged from the data included: a) Professional learning should include principles of collaborative learning. Collaborative learning provided teachers with an opportunity to work with their peers. These activities were organised at the school site by the REC, and overwhelmingly, all research participant responses to these activities were positive; b) Professional learning should use adult learning theories and principles. Teachers had to learn new content and pedagogy to implement the new curriculum guidelines. However, adult learning is different from student learning. In planning and organising professional learning activities adult learning principles of active engagement, relevance to current challenges, integration of experience, learning style variation and choice and self direction (Knowles et al., 1998) needed to be considered; and c) Professional learning should use protocols and professional language. Teachers need to develop a professional dialogue to inform their conversations when participating in various collaborative processes. Protocols consist of agreed upon guidelines for conversation and a variety of 'protocol tools' are available to collaboratively analyse student work (Blythe et al., 2008).

#### Theme Four. Context of Professional Learning

##### *Introduction*



The fourth theme that emerged from the data concerned the context of professional learning. Two key understandings emerged in this theme during phase one. These understandings as perceived by teachers included: a) Professional learning should be school based, and b) Professional learning should be linked to outside professional organisations, such as the Catholic Education Office and Universities. Figure 4.4 outlines the theme and key understandings.



*Figure 4.4. Theme four. The context of professional learning in religious education*

#### *Professional Learning Should be School Based*

It was evident during the research, that teachers were using the term ‘school based professional learning’, synonymously with ‘site based professional learning’. Further investigation of participants’ understanding of ‘school based’ revealed that, if opportunities were available at the ‘school site’, all teachers would have the option to attend the activity. If the activity was located at another site, only two or three teachers would possibly be able to attend, and therefore benefit.<sup>21</sup> Participants believed that they had ‘gained information’ from professional learning activities that were held at school, but delivered by outside ‘experts’ that is, personnel from the CEO or University.

---

<sup>21</sup> Due to school budget constraints, this would be the case, unless the day was organised as a ‘pupil free day’, in which case all staff would be able to attend.

We liked the session with (T) and (L) from the CEO we learnt how to use the software, and then we can use it, when we teach the scripture unit (N).

It was great to have (W) from the University here; I learned so much from that. It will help me with my studies too (K).

The conclusions drawn from the literature about professional learning concur with the data that emerged. Schools need to ensure that professional learning is primarily school based and integral to school operations (Hawley & Valli, 1999). Whilst the literature advocated school based learning, this is not to underestimate that teachers can learn, and will need to enrich their own ideas and knowledge with experiences that may be gained from ‘outside sources and experts’ (Hawley & Valli, 1999; Lieberman, 2007; Lieberman & Miller, 2000). Fickel (2002) promoted a further viewpoint on school based learning:

Because learning is a social and cultural activity, knowledge and understandings develop in relationship with that social context...therefore a more promising venue for teacher learning would be the cultivation of teacher collaborative cultures within schools (p. 49).

This was evident in the following conversation:

N: I like to learn about things that I need to help my teaching

R:<sup>22</sup> What do you think would help your teaching, now?

N: Well I am teaching a unit on Pentecost and the Holy Spirit. I have read the material that we have in the resource banks but I am still not sure how to really teach it.

R: What could we organise that would help you?

N: It would be good to have some time with ...(peer teachers and the REC) so that we had time to discuss the topic and explore some really interesting ways for my students to learn. Some of the ideas, I just don’t get them, and maybe they could help me.

This conversation further highlighted the importance of learning being considered part of work (Smylie, 1989). New knowledge and information is needed in any learning environment to ensure that the organisation continues to improve. Huberman (1995a, 1995b) argued that if teachers are to effect changes in teaching practice, then teachers must participate in activities that combine work that is internal to the school, with interactions outside the school.

---

<sup>22</sup> R denotes researcher

*Professional Learning Should be Linked with Outside Professional Organisations*

*Such as the Catholic Education Office and Universities*

During the research, all participants had the opportunity to take part in a variety of activities, including activities with CEO personnel to develop teaching units, and lectures with ACU staff that provided background information on topics that were being taught within the guidelines GNL. In addition to this, four of the eighteen participants were completing their Graduate Certificate in Religious Education and one participant was completing a Master's Degree in Religious Education. The professional learning activities that staff members were undertaking by completing University courses also had an effect on other teaching staff. Most noticeable was the discussion in the staff room during recess and lunch times, for this often centered on assignments that were being completed.

The Graduate certificate in RE has been a huge help to me, I've learnt so much about what is appropriate to talk about (K).

This year we had (W) from the ACU and he was just talking about things and seeing the pictures of Jerusalem and places around that area ...just put it all into context (K).

It is essential for schools to create a context for teacher learning, that includes internal work for teachers with external consultations and/or expertise. In this process schools are seen as professional learning communities that have developed partnerships and networks with universities and other educational authorities (DuFour, 2004; Lieberman & Miller, 2000; Senge, 2000; Stoll et al., 2003). The content of the professional learning must come from inside and outside the learner and from both research and practice. Professional learning opportunities must honour the knowledge of the practising teacher as well as draw on research and other sources of expertise outside schools and classrooms. Artful professional learning design effectively combines theory and practice (Loucks-Horsley et al., 1998). As

previously noted, it is mandatory that all teaching staff in Tasmanian Catholic primary schools gain and maintain accreditation to teach religious education. Various options are available. These options include participating in formal study through ACU, participating in professional learning activities that have been designed and/or coordinated by CEO staff, or participating in professional learning activities provided by the school that have been approved for accreditation. The accreditation maintenance program ensures that teachers continue to participate at these various levels in professional learning of religious education.

Whilst the participants advocated school based learning, there are times when teachers need to enrich their own ideas and knowledge with experiences that may be gained from ‘outside sources’ (Lieberman, 1995). New knowledge and information will be needed in any learning environment to ensure that the organisation continues to improve. Huberman (1995a) argued that if teachers are to effect changes in teaching practice, they must participate in activities that combine work that is internal to the school, with interactions outside the school.

Professional learning must also align with and support system-based changes that promote student learning (Loucks-Horsley et al., 1998). This requires alignment at the school, system and state levels (Fullan, 2005a).

#### *Summary of Key Understandings from Theme Four*

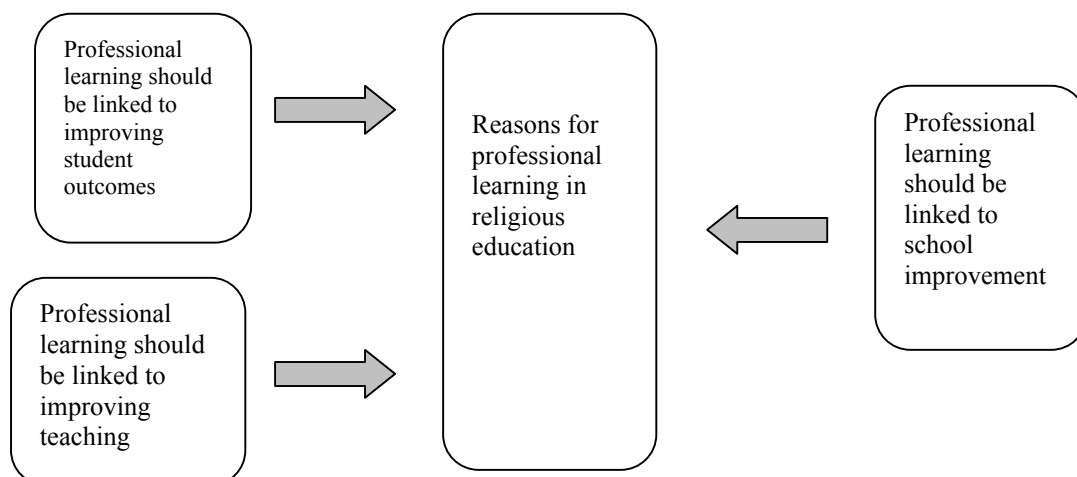
The professional learning that occurred during phase one did align with system and university partnerships. The System (CEO) had provided support for the implementation of the guidelines GNL, in addition to providing workshops, in-services and school follow-up opportunities for all teachers. In addition to this, four participants were completing formal qualification in religious education and all other research participants were involved in gaining and maintaining religious education accreditation points. The key understandings as

perceived by teachers that emerged included: a) Professional learning should be school-based. All participants indicated that they believed that the school site was the best venue for professional learning. When activities were held on site, it was possible for many more teachers to attend; and b) Professional learning should be linked with outside professional organisations such as the CEO and Universities. All participants believed that they did learn from professional learning that was delivered by ‘outside experts’. In addition to this, participants were either gaining or maintaining points for accreditation in religious education; therefore, they believed that it was important to retain links with the CEO and the Universities.

### Theme Five. Reasons for Professional Learning

#### *Introduction*

The final theme that emerged from the data was linked to the reasons for participating in professional learning. Three key understandings as perceived by teachers emerged from the data. These included: a) Professional learning should be about improving student outcomes; b) Professional learning should be about improving teaching; and c) Professional learning should be about school improvement. These three understandings emerged during both phases of data collection, but this chapter discusses data as it emerged during the first phase. Figure 4.5 outlines the theme and key understandings.



---

*Figure 4.5. Theme five. Reasons for professional learning*

*Professional Learning Should be Linked to Improving Student Outcomes*

It is universally accepted in the professional learning and school improvement literature that improving student outcomes should be the focus of all professional learning. Schooling is concerned with student achievement and teachers need to teach students to become more powerful learners (Cotton, 2003; DuFour, 2004; Marzano, 2003a; Stoll et al., 2003). During the interviews in phase one, participants had opportunities to reflect on the learning activities in which they had participated:

B: We need to ‘up’ our RE lessons.

R:<sup>23</sup> What do you mean by ‘up’?

B: We need to raise the bar, to challenge student thinking. Moderation made us think about how the students were learning, what we were teaching. As a group, we examined student work. It was great to hear the responses from other teachers, to hear what they believed the students had learnt.

Doing moderation, and looking at the work samples, made me think about my own teaching of the particular unit. I was wondering what the students in my class had learnt from the unit (E).

Doing RE is challenging student thinking, we need to work out ways to do that, so that it is more than just getting students to know a lot of facts (K).

Teaching is no longer seen as transmitting knowledge from teachers and texts to students. As we learn more about how students learn, the notion of teaching by telling is being (or should be) replaced by “teaching for learning” (Hawley & Valli, 1999 p. 132).

The resource banks give us lots of ideas, but we have to pick them out of here...how do we know which one is better than the next? We have to really know what and how we want our students to learn (D).

---

<sup>23</sup> R denotes the researcher

It seems to be, this is just a list of things/ activities that could be fun or whatever; I don't know that they are actually teaching the concept that I'm trying to get across. I'm not sure that I am making the links for the students, at the moment they are just doing the activities, like any other activities – but they happen to be RE topics, i.e. we are doing the 'Life of Jesus', so we're learning about what life was like in the first century. I think it's a great topic, I love it, and so do the children. But we could have taken another character that lived during this time and created information about life during the times. We need to do something that makes Jesus the focus. I know what I am going to do. I will end up talking about why Jesus is special and why we have chosen Jesus and not anyone else. That way I am making the links, because I have to really think about how the students will learn this (C).

This indicates that links were beginning to be made by participants between professional learning and student outcomes (Meiers & Ingvarson, 2003).

Schools are increasingly being expected to be more accountable for student achievement. This is evidenced in the National testing programs that have emerged over the last year.<sup>24</sup> In the past we may have trusted that any and all teacher learning was good. However, we are increasingly more concerned with what and how well teachers are learning and whether students are benefiting from teachers' professional development (Tallerico, 2005). Hence, connecting adult learning directly to students' needs and linking the ultimate purpose of professional learning to improving student achievement is becoming practice (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Marzano, 2003a).

### *Professional Learning Should be Linked to School Improvement*

One of the most persistent findings from research on school improvement is the relationship between professional learning and school improvement (Bryk et al., 1996; Fullan, 1993; Guskey, 1995).

M: These activities (professional learning) need to be recorded with our school improvement plan.

R.<sup>25</sup> Why do you say that?

<sup>24</sup> NAPLAN (National Assessment Program in Literacy and Numeracy) was introduced to all Primary school students in Gr. 3, 5, in all Australian primary schools in May 2008.

<sup>25</sup> R denotes the researcher

M: If this is not school improvement then, what is it? How can we describe what we have been doing? I think everything we do in professional learning to improve our teaching, to improve student learning and their achievements is part of what we are trying to do, to improve our school and that is school improvement.

The American Federation of Teachers (1995) concluded that:

Without professional development, school reform will not happen...The nation can adopt rigorous standards, set forth a visionary scenario, compile the best research about how students learn, change the nature of textbooks and assessment, promote teaching strategies that have been successful with a wide range of students, and change all the other elements involved in systemic reform. But, unless the classroom teacher understands and is committed to the plan and knows how to make it happen, the dream will come to naught (pp. 1-2, as cited in Hawley & Valli, 1999, p. 129).

It is therefore imperative that professional learning plans are clearly linked to school improvement plans and processes.

### *Summary of Key Understandings from Theme Five*

The data indicated that all participants believed that the purpose of professional learning was ultimately concerned with improving learning and outcomes for students. Linked to this understanding was the concept that to improve learning for students, ‘teaching’ needed to improve. This included improving the teaching pedagogies and subject matter knowledge of teachers. Furthermore, participants acknowledged that this ‘cycle’ of professional learning needed to be incorporated into the school’s annual plans.

### *Conclusion*

Chapter four analysed the themes and key understandings that emerged from the data during phase one of the research. These themes and perceived key understandings related to the characteristics of effective professional learning. Table 4.1 outlines the five themes and the key understandings that emerged.

*Table 4.1. Themes and key understandings from chapter four.*



Theme	Key Understandings
Theme one.  Change and professional learning, the school environment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The need to create a culture of ‘change’.</li> <li>2. The need to sustain the change. Change needs time.</li> <li>3. The need to create a supportive environment.</li> <li>4. The need to create a sense of purpose.</li> </ol>
Theme two.  The content of professional learning in religious education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Professional learning should be needs based and include content knowledge of the unit to be taught.</li> <li>2. Professional learning needs to address teachings skills and ‘best practice’.</li> <li>3. Professional learning needs to address relevant topics.</li> </ol>
Theme three.  The structure and design of professional learning in religious education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Professional learning should include the principles of collaborative learning.</li> <li>2. Professional learning should consider adult learning styles and theories.</li> <li>3. Professional learning should use protocols and professional language or dialogue.</li> </ol>
Theme four.  The context of professional learning in religious education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Professional learning should be school based.</li> <li>2. Professional learning should be linked with outside professional organisations such as the Catholic education Office and Universities.</li> </ol>
Theme five.  The reasons for professional learning in religious education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Professional learning should be linked to improving student outcomes.</li> <li>2. Professional learning should be linked to improving teaching.</li> <li>3. Professional learning should be linked to school improvement.</li> </ol>

The following chapter analyses and discusses theory that was generated during the second phase of the data gathering process. The second phase included an evaluation of the professional learning activities undertaken during the first phase. The evaluation drawn from the work of Tallerico (2005) has previously been outlined in Chapter three and was used to

determine the professional learning activities that were implemented during the second phase of the study.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **ANALYSIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THEORY: PART TWO**

#### Introduction

Chapter four analysed the theory and identified the characteristics of effective professional learning that emerged from the data during phase one of the research. These characteristics were identified and described in five themes and related key understandings. Chapter five presents the theory that was generated and analyses the data that was collected during the second phase of the data gathering process. Prior to the implementation of the second phase of data collection, an evaluation<sup>26</sup> was undertaken. This evaluation helped to discern the professional learning activities that were implemented during the second phase of data collection. The collection process used the data gathering techniques of questionnaires, interviews, discussions and classroom observation, as outlined in chapter three. During the second phase of data gathering, participants elaborated on the characteristics of effective professional learning, and discussed the effects of these activities on their professional growth, their teaching practices and student learning.

The major themes that emerged from the data included the themes as outlined during the first phase, in addition to two new themes, these new themes were, a) professional learning that influences teaching practices and b) professional learning that influences student achievement. Key understandings as perceived by teachers that emerged from the data and that have previously been outlined and discussed in chapter four have only been discussed in chapter five, if the data provided additional information.

---

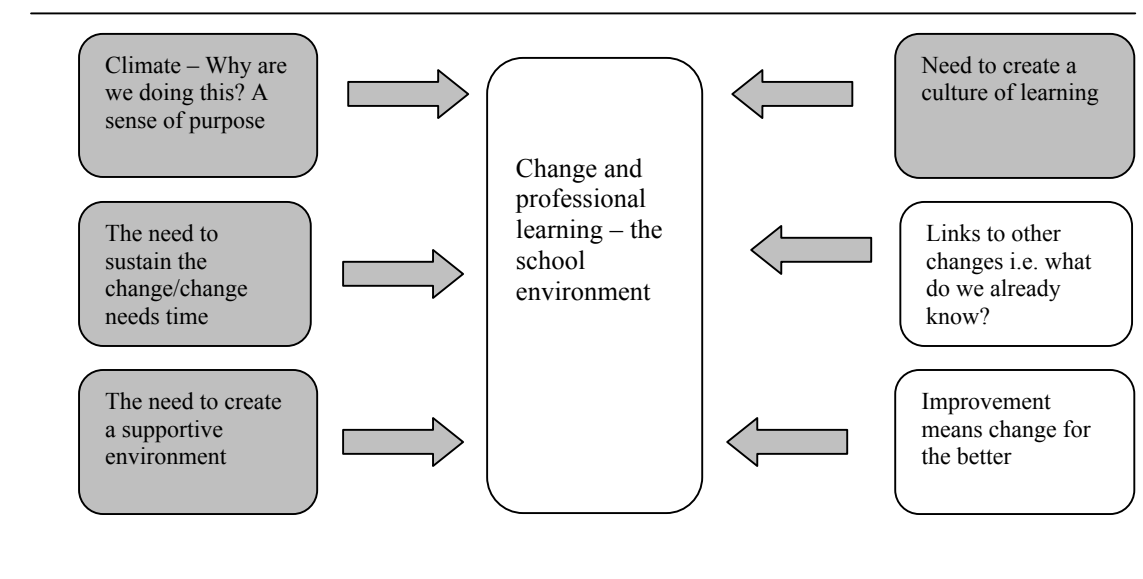
<sup>26</sup> See chapter three for an outline of the evaluation.

## Theme One. Change and Professional Learning

### *Introduction*

Two new key understandings emerged from the data that were associated with the theme, ‘change and professional learning’, during the second phase of data gathering. It became evident that teachers were beginning to link the changes in teaching pedagogies and skills that had previously been implemented in other curriculum areas to teaching and learning in religious education. In addition to the two new key understandings, additional data emerged for the perceived understandings that were previously identified. These included: a) change takes time, and b) the need to establish a ‘climate’ or a sense of purpose. This additional information is also analysed in this chapter.

Figure 5.1 outlines the theme and key understandings. The shaded understandings were identified during phase one.



*Figure 5.1. Theme One. Change and professional learning*

### *Links to Other Changes – Transferring Knowledge and Skills Across Subject Disciplines*

During phase one, participants outlined the need to ensure that principles of ‘best practice’ were used in teaching (see theme 2, key understanding 2). During the second phase

of the project, participants were beginning to ‘link and transfer’ their teaching knowledge and skills from other subject areas to religious education.

We have already had an in-service training day with (V). We could just use the new skills we have learnt to teach in literacy and use some of these same skills and strategies when we teach RE (B).

I know that (I) is already using some good strategies; I have seen him and his children. You can tell the children really enjoy it. We all just need to learn how to use those strategies. We need to set up something so that we all know what to do (E).

Even if you’re a Catholic and you’ve probably grown up with all these things, all of them are still sometimes hard to grasp even for the teachers, so yeah, its just a matter of being really aware of all those things and keeping yourself up to speed of all those things so you are able to sort of take that and use it in the classroom (J).

To ensure that religious education included the same academic rigor as other curriculum areas, teachers needed to ensure that a variety of teaching skills were used to impart the necessary knowledge. These skills could be transferred between learning areas. Little commentary was available and Malone’s (1997) earlier study indicated that teachers were not necessarily making these links or transferring their skills between subject disciplines. However, it was evident during this research project that teachers were beginning to transfer pedagogical skills across subject disciplines. Phase two of the research also included classroom observation. It became evident during the observations that teachers were using the pedagogical processing skills as suggested in GNL and previous professional learning workshops. The observations indicated that classroom instructional practices included activities such as story mapping, to assist children in their understanding of the content matter, and the use of Y-charts and Venn diagrams, when expecting children to compare and summarize information. 72% of participating teachers were beginning to use their knowledge of ‘best practice’ to inform their practice within the religious education classroom.

A grade three student explained the activity that his group had completed as part of the Scripture unit that the class had studied:

We made the people out of plasticine and then we took a video and told the story, oh, the story was about Zacchaeus up the tree, then we changed the way the plasticine people moved and took the video again, and we did it over and over so it looked like the people were moving. It was animation. I really liked doing that... (grade three student).

The teaching pedagogies that teachers were beginning to use in their religious education classrooms had been learnt in previous professional learning activities in other key discipline areas, such as Literacy.<sup>27</sup> 72% of participants in the research were able to transfer the skills they had learnt in one teaching discipline to religious education.

We learnt how to use the technology with (TT). The students love to use it. I think they really learnt about the story of Zacchaeus and were thinking about it, because the students showed the video to a younger class and they talked about what they had learnt. They talked a lot about the technical points of making the animation, but they talked a bit about the story, but I think that is what I have to work on next. What really is the point of the Scripture story for this grade? I have to make the links in my teaching (I).

This theme of using ‘thinking’ pedagogies but not necessarily making the links to religious education for students is also evident in the following comments:

To find the common elements from the gospels for the nativity story the students completed a Venn diagram. This showed clearly the elements that were common to all three gospels. This helped us to do the external assessment task ..... no I did not teach them about the gospel writers and their audience, really I just wanted the students to know that there were some similarities and some differences in the nativity story between the gospel stories... It was really just about the assessment task (Q).

It was evident that teachers were beginning to make pedagogical changes when teaching religious education and therefore it was beginning to develop more academic rigor. The researcher, however, was concerned that although new teaching pedagogies and skills were being introduced into the religious education curriculum, which were addressing knowledge acquisition skills, teachers were not necessarily linking teaching practice to outcomes in the

---

<sup>27</sup> Teachers within the research project had previously participated in a Literacy professional learning project. This project had been completed during 2003 - 2007 and included various pedagogical strategies to improve literacy teaching.

spiritual or affective domains. Hack (2004) referred to this as a ‘meaning making’ model of learning. It is important, that educators ensure that they provide opportunities for ‘meaning making’, which occur through design and not by accident.

*Improvement Means a Change for the Better*

Linked closely with ensuring that there was a sense of purpose to the professional learning activities, 50% of participants claimed that if adopting new guidelines, or using new teaching skills or new resources, the ‘new’ was often interpreted as ‘improved’. The participants believed that there was no reason for ‘change,’ if things weren’t ‘better’. In questioning participants understanding of ‘better’, they verbalised that ‘change’ needed to equate to improvement and this needed to be linked to improved student outcomes.

I really liked using the old guidelines, they were easy to use, the students liked the activities, there is no point taking all this time to write new guidelines and then have us use them, if they aren’t going to improve the religious knowledge of the students (M).

It’s really important that teaching and learning improves; there is no point in doing all this if learning is not better for students (A).

At the end of the day things have to be better. By better, I mean they have to be better for students. If we learn about new ways of teaching, these ways have to be better for them (L).

To further clarify the notion of ensuring that ‘change was for the better’, the researcher questioned the group on their thoughts. The most common theme was that ‘better’ was linked to improving ‘outcomes’ for students, however one participant commented:

Things need to be better for teachers too. We should feel good about RE... and know what we are talking about (C).

Participants believed that professional learning was linked to ‘change’. That is, the learning of new curriculum materials and teaching pedagogies were all linked to ‘change’. If teachers were to implement these new pedagogical skills into their classroom context, a

‘change’ was necessitated. Teachers were quite prepared to participate in activities that would teach them and support them in making the necessary changes. There was a belief that if these ‘changes’ were going to be implemented, participants wanted to feel assured that ‘learning for students’ would improve. That is, if teachers were going to take the time to ‘change’, then outcomes for students had to improve.

### *The Need to Sustain Change/ Change Needs Time*

During phase two of the research project, teachers had the opportunity to work and plan their religious education unit and assessment tasks. The unit was then taught to the class. Following this opportunity, teachers were given ‘time’ to moderate the assessment tasks. The ‘time’ given to the teachers included release opportunities to plan with co-teachers in addition to time during staff and planning meetings (after school). The comments from research participants included:

It was great to have the time to plan together, you learn so much more from your co-teacher. It helps you to see things clearly (J).

I have been teaching for 27 years, this is one of the best sessions that I have been part of...just having time to work with each other (M).

Although specific details of teacher planning and preparation times were not recorded, the researcher noticed that when teachers were given opportunities to work together during school hours they were also beginning to work together more often during their ‘own preparation time’. This included ‘after school’ time. There was a noticeable time allocation that teachers were prepared to give to their own learning.

### *Climate – Why Are We Doing This? A Sense of Purpose*



Another common theme throughout the second phase of the research project was the commitment of teachers to improving the learning outcomes for students. All professional learning activities were structured around this central theme.

The second survey was administered during the second phase. The survey indicated that all participants believed that they had enough knowledge and felt supported about the curriculum change ‘most of the time’. Teachers also indicated that they understood the purpose and direction of the professional learning and the curriculum change. One explanation for the high number of participants feeling that they had ‘enough knowledge’ could be due to the fact that they had already participated in professional learning for the implementation of GNL during phase one. However, all participants had also been involved in the evaluation and the subsequent construction and implementation of the second phase of the project. This provided participants with ownership of the process and their learning.

It was good to pick the activities<sup>28</sup> that we were going to do (B).

It is better if we can be involved in the process of choosing the activities that will be of benefit to us, and then we can pick the ones that will help our teaching. It is better if it helps our teaching, it could be about content though (D).

All participants developed a sense of purpose to engage in professional learning activities. This purpose was to improve their teaching, which in turn, would lead to improved learning outcomes for students.

### *Summary of Key Understandings from Theme One*

During the second phase of implementation, teachers were engaged in selecting activities for their professional learning in religious education. All participants were involved in collaborative opportunities to program, plan, implement and assess learning opportunities for students. These changes were administered in small incremental steps throughout a

---

<sup>28</sup> The participant was referring to professional learning activities

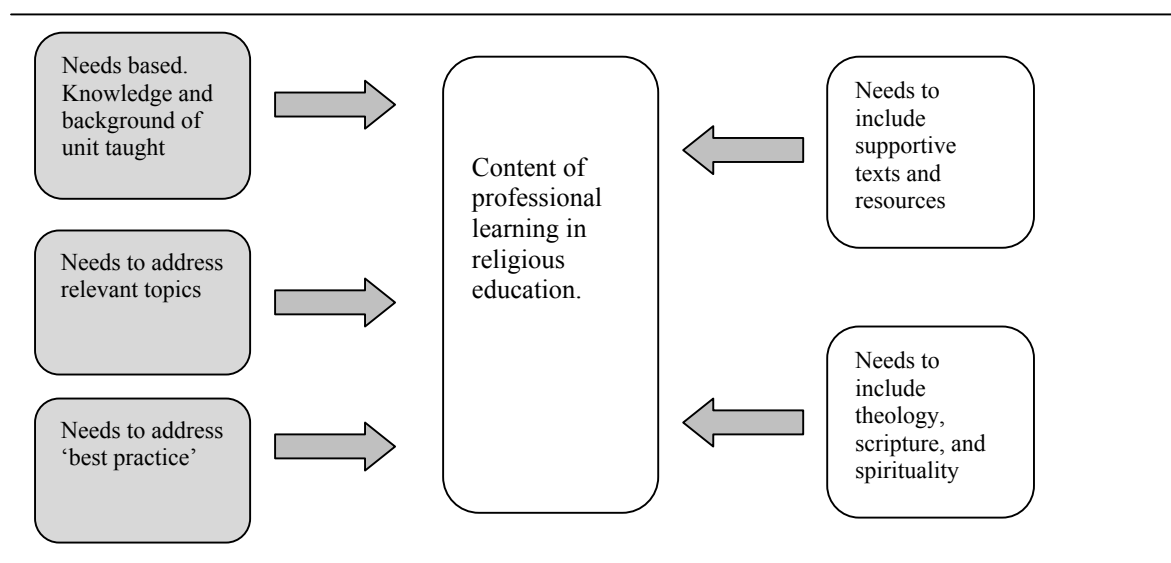
twelve-week period. In taking this developmental approach, it was anticipated that teachers would feel less overwhelmed by the changes and the sheer amount of ‘change’ that is inherent in teaching. A total of six perceived key understandings emerged from the data. Four of these emerged during phase one: a) The need to create a culture of learning; b) Professional learning needs to occur in a supportive environment; c) Professional learning takes time; d) Professional learning needs to have a clear and focused purpose. During the second phase, a further two key understandings emerged, these included: e) Professional learning in religious education needs to be linked to professional learning and changes in other key learning areas; and f) Professional learning means change and change has to be linked to improvement.

## Theme Two. The Content of Professional Learning.

### *Introduction*

The second theme that emerged from the data outlined the content that participants perceived should be included in professional learning. During phase one, participants identified three perceived key understandings. These included: a) Participants’ perceived professional learning should be ‘needs based’ and include the background content knowledge of the unit to be taught; b) Professional learning should include models of ‘best practice’; and c) Professional learning in religious education should include relevant topics, not just units taught in class.

During phase two, a further two perceived key understandings emerged from the data. These understandings included the need to include supportive texts and resources and the need to include theology, Scripture and spirituality in professional learning opportunities. Figure 5.2 outlines the second theme and key understandings that emerged. The shaded understandings were identified in phase one and discussed in chapter four.



*Figure 5.2. Theme two. The content of professional learning in religious education*

*Professional Learning, Needs to Include Supportive Texts and Classroom Resources*

The key understanding that religious education has to be adequately resourced emerged from the data during collaborative assessments, group interviews and on classroom visits during phase two.

The big books from *Know Worship and Love* are great, they are a great resource, but we just don't have enough up to date resources (C).

The REC and librarian also provided input, in the attempt to update the religious education resources in the library:

I need someone to direct me, we need to cull the RE resources, some of these stories and books came with Noah on the ark (T).

And then from teachers during a planning time:

We won't get their interest if we don't have any good resources, they make the lessons interesting. Like the Godly play dolls, I love using them to tell Scripture stories and the children just love them too (B).

Any curriculum area needs adequate resourcing. In addition to having adequate resources, the teachers also need support and follow-up to ensure that materials and resources

are used appropriately (Hawley & Valli, 1999). If this support is not provided, then it is unlikely that professional competence and student achievement are experienced.

*Professional Learning in Religious Education Should Include Theology,  
Scripture and Spirituality*

Of the eighteen research participants, eleven had completed their accreditation and seven participants were given provisional accreditation and were working towards completing their accreditation. Of the eleven who had received accreditation to ‘teach RE’ in a Catholic school, nine of the participants received this accreditation through completion of units of work through the Tasmanian Pastoral Institute. This is a Tasmanian accreditation certificate, and is not necessarily recognised in other states. Two of the eleven had gained accreditation through completion of formal<sup>29</sup> study at ACU. Of the seven participants who were working towards accreditation status, five were completing the Graduate diploma at ACU and two participants were completing units through the Tasmanian CEO.

From the questionnaires and interview data, the key understanding of feeling ‘inadequate’ in teaching religious education emerged. In further discussions, this inadequacy was explored. The participants spoke of not ‘having enough background knowledge’ for the unit being taught. Specifically, the three areas of Scripture, theology and spirituality were mentioned. Discussing the content of a unit to be taught, one participant commented:

We were brought up to believe everything in Scripture is true, now we have to interpret it a different way and I don’t know if I know enough about the new way of thinking (M).

In a discussion of the curriculum and the teaching strategies that were being used by teachers, this participant discussed the professional learning days that were enjoyed:

---

<sup>29</sup> “Formal” used in this context relates to study that is recognised in other Australian states.

The days when we had a chance to go through and reflect on different things were the best, especially the Scripture and theology (L).

In discussing the elements of professional learning that helped participants with their understanding of the topic that they were teaching, one participant commented,

I think I learnt a lot as well because we did parts of the Mass, because I went to their first Communion and it all came back to me from when I went to school, and then I was able to teach. But, I really don't know a lot. I really need help (J).

The understanding of requiring further knowledge in Scripture and theology can be linked to ensuring that partnerships exist with Universities and systemic accreditation requirements, as outlined in the previous chapter. 72% of participants suggested that professional learning that included the disciplines of Scripture and theology would help their teaching in the classroom.

The session that we had with (W) from the University, on Scripture, that really helped when we were teaching that unit (M).

I did the Scripture unit with (Z) as part of my Grad Cert. course. I think that was the one that helped me the most, when it came to my teaching (K).

There is a need to ensure that all teachers teaching religious education have opportunities to complete appropriate qualifications. In addition to this, there is a need to ensure that within school professional learning opportunities there are continuous opportunities for further knowledge within the subject discipline of religious education.

I don't really know about the Mass and why we do the things that we do. I need to learn more about it so my teaching is better (J).

If I don't really know, then I'm just telling the children about it, I'm not really teaching for understanding, because I really don't understand (J).

Teachers need knowledge of the subject-matter, as their thinking, classroom behaviour and student learning are influenced by their knowledge and beliefs (Fickel, 2002; Marzano, 2003a). It is reasonable to assume that the critical level of subject-matter knowledge is different from grade level to grade level (Marzano, 2003a). Therefore, an important component of teacher professional learning needs to be the expansion and

elaboration of their professional knowledge (Hawley & Valli, 1999). Teachers need opportunities to broaden their knowledge base in religious education. To broaden their knowledge base in religious education would include the study of theology and Scripture. Opportunities to participate in these activities will need to be derived from outside and ‘expert’ sources. There are various opportunities that are made available to Tasmanian Catholic school teachers to participate in these activities.

According to Tasmanian CEO guidelines, professional learning activities provided for staff members throughout any year also require schools to provide at least one student free day as a ‘spirituality day’. Comments about the ‘spirituality day’ from research participants included:

It was great to have the day with (X) it was good to have time to revisit our school Mission and Vision statement, to see if they were still relevant (O).

It gave us time to think about our purpose, what we are really doing (N).

It was evident from the discussion that all participants were appreciative of the ‘time’ to reflect on the ‘school’s mission’ and their personal response to this mission. Palmer (1998) has made a contribution to the understanding between teaching and spirituality. Discussing the complexity of teaching, that includes teaching subject matter and students, “teachers, teach who we are” (p. 2).

Teaching like any truly human activity, emerges from one’s inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project my soul onto my students, my subject and our way of being together. The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less that the convolutions of my inner life (Palmer, 1998, p. 2).

As part of their contract to teach in a Catholic school, staff members are expected to support the school’s ethos. This means participation in school liturgies and prayers. Teachers are expected to affirm the values that underpin the school’s Mission, and accept the ways in which religion enters into the life and curriculum of the school. If the school is an authentic learning community, then its corporate spirituality should not only be geared to help the

students, but also to enhance the personal spirituality of teachers. This means the construction of activities that are intended specifically for the benefit of staff (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006). These constructed activities need to form part of the professional learning for staff in religious education.

### *Summary of Key Understandings from Theme Two*

During phase one, three perceived key understandings emerged from the data. These included: a) Professional learning should be needs based and include content knowledge of the unit to be taught; b) Professional learning needs to address teachings skills and ‘best practice’; and c) Professional learning needs to address relevant topics. Phase two identified a further two understandings: d) Professional learning needs to include supportive texts and resources – teachers need adequate resources including texts to support their work when implementing new curriculum materials; and e) Professional learning in religious education needs to include, theology, Scripture and spirituality. Teachers need subject matter knowledge in religious education. This is a critical component in broadening their knowledge, and therefore this would include studies of theology and Scripture. Teachers also need opportunities for personal spiritual growth as they are expected to support the Catholic school’s ethos. Therefore, professional learning opportunities for personal spiritual growth need to be constructed. These understandings are at times interrelated as all understandings could be interpreted as being ‘needs based’, or being ‘relevant’. Participants used these specific understandings, however, when referring to the content of the various aspects of professional learning in religious education.

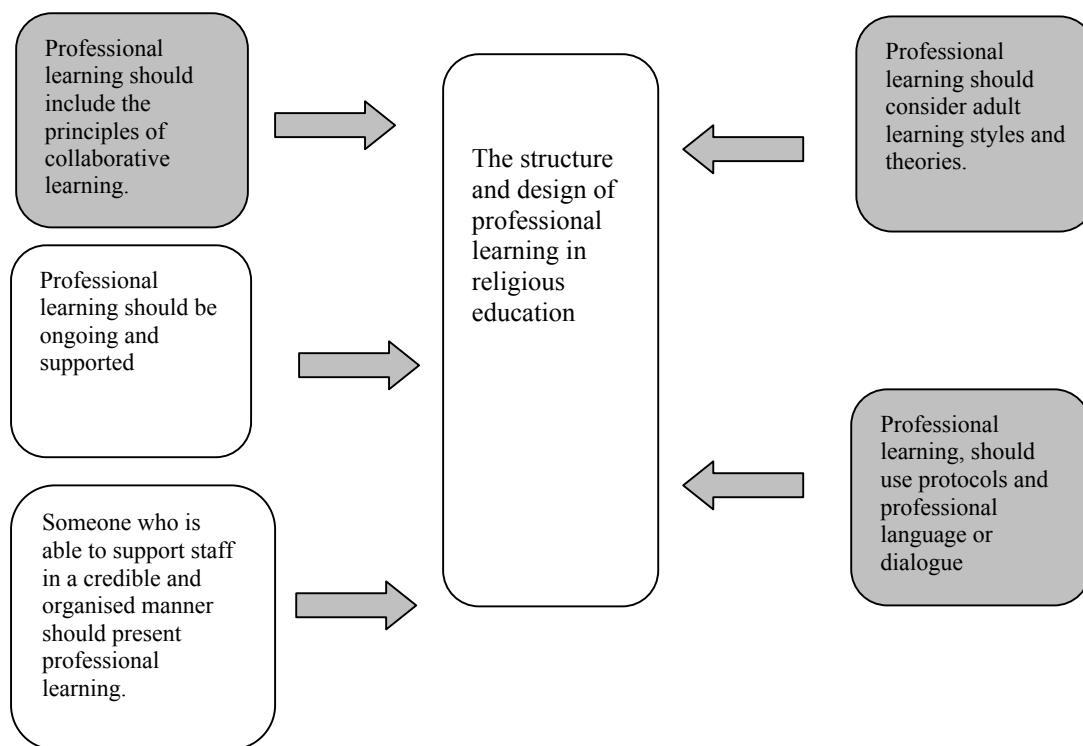
### Theme Three: Structure of Professional Learning

#### *Introduction*

The third theme that emerged from the data described the structure and design of professional learning. During the first phase of data collection, three perceived key understandings emerged within this theme. These included: a) Professional learning should include the principles of collaborative learning; b) Professional learning should consider adult learning styles and theories; and c) Professional learning should use protocols and professional dialogue. A further two understanding emerged from the data during the second phase of data collection: d) Professional learning should be ongoing and supported and e) Professional learning should be presented by someone who is able to support staff in a credible and organised manner. In addition to the emergence of two perceived key understandings during phase one, additional information about the three perceived key understandings of professional learning, including principles of collaborative learning, adult learning theories and professional dialogue emerged from the data.

Figure 5.3 outlines the third theme, the structure and design of professional learning and its key understandings. The perceived key understandings that were identified during the first phase have been shaded.





*Figure 5.3. Theme three. The structure and design of professional learning*

*Professional Learning Should Include the Principles of Collaborative Learning.*

During the second phase, all participants had the opportunity to choose the collaborative structures within which they worked.

We liked working together, we can learn from each other. I particularly liked to plan and program with my partner teacher.... It makes me feel more confident (J).

It was good when we worked together. When we work together, it means that we are all on the same page; you know our language is the same (K).

In addition to professional learning opportunities that included principles of collaboration in programming and planning for religious education, it was ensured that these principles were embedded throughout the content and process of all professional learning activities that were undertaken during the second phase of implementation.

The survey administered at the conclusion of the second phase indicated that no participant felt excluded from the professional learning process, with 71% of participants rating the feeling as a score of +3, out of a possible score of +4 to -4. In answering the question on participation, all research participants felt they had participated in decision-making relating to the change and the discussions highlighted the value of collaboration.

I think one of the most important things that we do is to work together, that really helps us, makes us feel like we are not doing it on our own (D).

The best is working with others, definitely the best (J).

Working with my partner teacher and others in the group, definitely enjoy that the best (K).

Learning that fosters and supports ongoing teacher collaboration offers numerous benefits to schools and teachers (Fickel, 2002). Collaboration has positive effects on school culture by breaking down teacher isolation (Bryk et al., 1996), promoting the development of a shared language and understanding of good practice (Little, 1982), and increasing teachers' sense of efficacy and satisfaction. Moreover, collaboration enhances teacher learning and skill acquisition (Barth, 1991; Blythe et al., 2008) and strengthens teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (Fickel, 2002).

### *Professional Learning Should Use Adult Learning Theories and Principles*

Activities that were planned for phase two allowed for a variety of adult learning styles and principles to be explored. Subsequent activities included workshops, lectures, discussion groups and collaborative planning and assessment groups. This ensured that there were learning opportunities for choice and self-direction, active engagement, integration of prior knowledge and relevance to the challenges being faced by participants (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b). When participants had this opportunity to actively engage in the professional learning process, comments included:

It was good that we were able to work together; this really helps our teaching (L).

We are able to work together, this means that we can learn from each other (C).

Planning and working together means that we are not on our own, it is so much easier (E).

Adult learning theory also indicated that it is important to ensure that adults have the opportunity for self-directedness, to shape what and how they learn and to use the prior knowledge and experience of individuals to support and develop the 'new' learning (Knowles et al., 1998).

The following comments were made following collaborative assessment:

The protocol was good; it was really good, for (I) to share his student work with us. We thought of ideas to give him, to help his students. But I think it was also about giving him ideas to help his teaching. I know it gave me a chance to also think about how I taught the unit of work, and the task that I had asked children to complete. It made me think about what I needed to teach (J).

Talking about the unit of work made me reflect on my teaching. It was really different talking about it. I liked getting the feedback about student work. It made me think about what I should be asking the students to do, so that I know what they have actually learnt (Q).

During our planning times, we get together now and plan our work. Sometimes we talk about student work, sometimes we plan units. It's good. We don't have to wait until someone tells us what to do. It's like we are in charge (D).

These comments were indicative of all participants, as they were beginning to feel a sense of ownership of their learning and that their learning was becoming more self-directed.

### *Professional Learning Should Use Protocols and Professional Language or Dialogue*

The use of the protocol also expected that teachers collaboratively assess student work. Again, this replaces the isolation of teachers, and the opportunity to work with others can highlight resources, ideas and strategies that make individual efforts more productive.

Chapter four outlined the data that was collected during phase one that was related to the use of a protocol in the moderation exercise. During phase two, participants again

engaged in the use of a protocol. The tuning protocol (Blythe et al., 2008), as opposed to the moderation assessment protocol, was used. The tuning protocol is a structured, facilitated conversation that asks participants to provide the presenter with feedback, both warm and cool, on a particular topic/unit. All participants collaboratively planned units of work and assessment rubrics, and the use of a protocol was to give the presenting teacher both ‘cold and warm’ feedback on the assessment task.

I think this activity helped us more than the last assessment protocol that we used in RE. This time we got to plan the unit and the task, and then giving each other feedback on what we did, made us think about our teaching (B).

I found this really hard, at first, to talk about what I am doing. But this time the protocol made more sense. We started planning, and then teaching, and then the protocol was like the evaluation or the feedback from others, from our peers. Then we had time to do our own evaluation (K).

The use of protocols allows for a guided conversation between teaching professionals. It offers “a learning environment with unique features, and therefore unique opportunities for the growth of understanding and professional skill and judgment” (Allen & Blythe, 2004, p. 28).

There are three other note-worthy differences in the professional learning that uses collegial conversations guided by protocols. The first is that within the group conversation, the group itself can determine the goals for the conversation, and how the members will pursue the goals (Allen & Blythe, 2004; Blythe et al., 2008). In other forms of professional learning this is not always the case. It is usually the workshop leader or provider who determines the particular learning goals for the group. Within the collegial conversation, the goals may reflect the school or system initiatives, but the group is ultimately responsible for achieving the goals that they have set.

The second noteworthy difference is that during other professional learning experiences the expertise is seen to reside ‘outside’ the group. The course presenter is seen as the ‘expert’ who has the skill and potential to enable participants to develop their own

expertise and skills. In the use of a group conversation guided by a protocol the ‘expertise’ resides with all participant members. All participant members, regardless of their experience have the opportunity to make a contribution to the conversation and consequently contribute to the group’s learning. “There is no monopoly on expertise” (Allen & Blythe, 2004, p. 28). This is not to deny the importance of attending workshops or other instructional sessions. Teachers may need to learn new content and skills in which case attendance at a workshop with an experienced facilitator may be appropriate. The use of guided conversations with colleagues gives teachers the opportunity to learn from one another, to reflect and to check their perceptions against other professionals, in addition to identifying the needs and goals for their own learning (Allen & Blythe, 2004; Blythe et al., 2008).

The third difference in the use of a protocol is the difference in the change theory that underlines approaches. Typically, the change theory that underlines professional learning is that learning new knowledge, skills, or pedagogies leads to change in teaching practices, which leads to improved student learning. The theory for looking collaboratively at student work and using guided conversation through hearing others’ perspectives and questions about it leads teachers to deepen their understanding of the work. This can lead teachers to developing new approaches, which leads to changes in their classroom practice, which leads to student improvement (Allen & Blythe, 2004; Blythe et al., 2008). That is, teachers have the opportunity to make their own decisions about changes to classroom contexts and teaching based on their deepened understanding of student work that were guided in collegial conversations.

*Professional Learning Should be Ongoing and Supported*

The final understanding that emerged from the data was that professional learning should be continuous and ongoing, involving follow up, support and opportunities for further learning (Fullan, 1993; Meiers & Ingvarson, 2003).

This should be our work, this learning we are doing needs to be our work. I mean it needs to happen more often (C).

Students should always be at the center of our discussions, but we need to have further input from (L) to make sure that what we are doing is on the right track (G).

I hope that we can do this again; it was good to work with others. I learnt a lot and I want to try some of the things. I want to do that in the next unit. Then I could see if the student learning is any better (D).

The quotes are indicative of the perceptions of all participants. They felt the need to continue with their learning in addition to the need to be supported from outside sources. New knowledge and information will be needed in any learning environment to ensure that the organisation continues to improve (Lieberman, 2007; Lieberman & Miller, 2000). There will be times when teachers need to enrich their own ideas and knowledge with experiences that may be gained from ‘outside sources’. Further discussions indicated that teachers felt this ‘outside learning or support’ was not about the ‘site’ for learning.

It<sup>30</sup> needs to be relevant to what we are learning and doing at school. It’s better when the whole team can participate, but it doesn’t matter if it’s at school or somewhere else. It’s important that it is relevant to what we are teaching (K).

This is in contrast to the data that was collected during phase one, theme four which outlined that all teachers thought the school was the best site for ‘professional leaning’. Obviously the ‘thinking’ had progressed from just ‘site based’ learning to also ensuring that learning was about ‘relevance’.

---

<sup>30</sup> ‘It’ denotes professional learning

*Professional Learning Should Be Presented by Someone Who Can Support Staff  
in a Credible and Organised Manner*

During the second phase of data collection 72% of participants spoke about various presenters within the professional learning programs.

It was useless when (L) came to tell us about the units we were supposed to be teaching. He gave us worksheets and wasn't even interested in what we were doing (B).

Several further conversations emanated from this, and participants discussed how they felt unsupported as the presenter showed little or no interest in what participants were teaching in class or what students were achieving.

He (L) didn't tell us anything that helped me in my teaching (C).

Participants did believe that it was important for the presenter to support their learning. Discussions and interviews highlighted the need for participants to feel supported in their learning within the classroom situation. They talked of presenters modelling lessons and observing classroom situations.

When (V) came into our classrooms to model the lesson, we could see what we were to do. Then it was obvious if we were on the right track (G).

It is essentially through presenters that participants experience professional learning programs. No research or commentary was available that discussed the role or attributes of the presenter within the professional learning program.

*Summary of Key Understandings from Theme Three*

All participants indicated that the structure and the design of professional learning in religious education needed to include principles of collaborative learning. All participants indicated that this was the most important design feature of any professional learning activity. Adult learning is different to student learning, and therefore when using activities, presenters

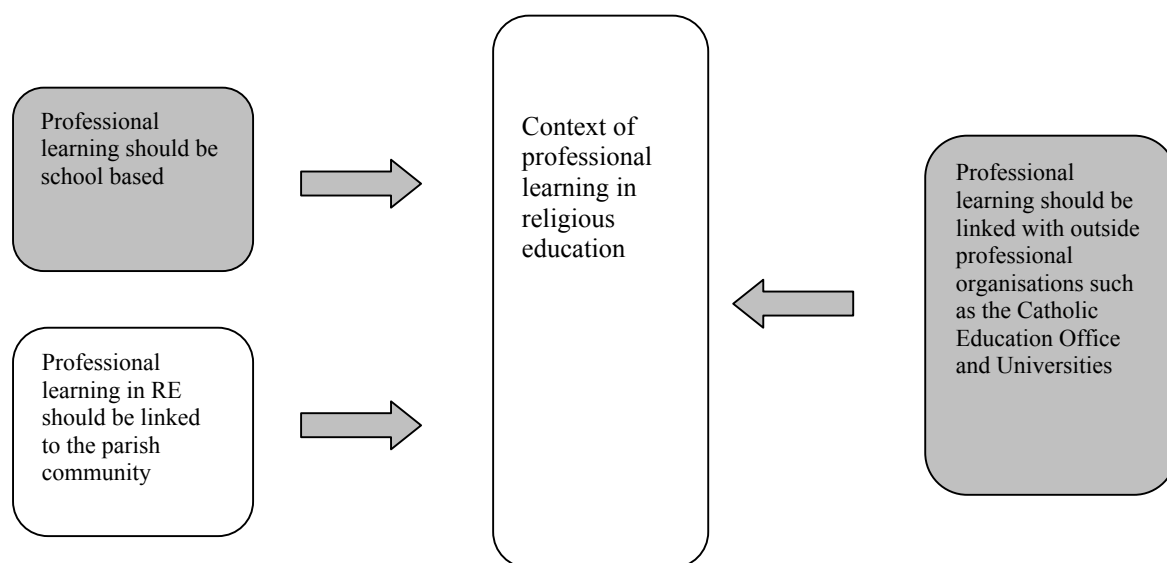
need to ensure that professional learning includes the principles of adult learning theories. Within collaborative professional learning activities, teachers need to develop a professional dialogue. The use of protocols offer teachers this professional dialogue. Professional learning for teachers also needs to be ongoing and supported. This support needs to come from a variety of levels at the school, system and State level. The presenter of professional learning needs to be perceived as being credible, organised, enthusiastic and interested. It is important that the presenter is able to provide on going support to participants.

#### Theme Four. Context of the Professional Learning

##### *Introduction*

The fourth theme that emerged from the data was the context of professional learning. During phase one, two perceived key understandings emerged. These included: a) Professional learning should be school based, and b) Professional learning should be linked to outside professional organisations, such as the CEO and Universities. During the second phase, a further perceived key understanding emerged and this outlined that professional learning in religious education should also be linked to the parish community. Figure 5.4 outlines the theme and the three key understandings that emerged from the data. The shaded understandings emerged from the data during the first phase and were discussed in chapter four.





*Figure 5.4. Theme four. The context of professional learning in religious education*

*Professional Learning in Religious Education Should be Linked to the Parish Community*

During the second phase of data gathering, students at the school were participating in a sacramental program. Sacramental preparation for students has been parish-based for the past three years. The parish has a sacramental coordinator who is responsible for coordinating sacramental preparations across two schools within the parish. At present, the school's REC and one other staff member assist with the sacramental preparation.

In previous years, school classes would take turns to help prepare the Sunday liturgy. Due to the lack of students and families who participated on a Sunday, this has not been practised for the past two years. The parish priest visits the school regularly, meeting with the teachers informally during recess breaks and formally when preparing class liturgies. These liturgies are now held on a weekday and celebrated at the school or the nearby secondary College chapel. The parish priest has also been involved in helping teachers plan their units if requested. This practice was welcomed by staff, however, 'time' has been a

factor as parishes have merged and one parish priest is now covering parishes which, in previous years, had four priests.

It's hard. It seems as though we are no longer part of the parish. We are not near the Church, so that makes it hard. We have to keep looking for ways; I think we need new ways to make sure that we keep our ties to the parish (I).

It's good having the Masses up here during the week. I think we actually have more parents here than what we had at the Church. I don't know about the parishioners though, and what they would say about it, but we need to keep talking to them (L).

Father (PP) is really good; he comes and talks to the children before we have a liturgy. That is good, and he meets them on their familiar ground. Then during the liturgy he really is fantastic. It's important that we keep working with the priest (A).

It's hard to keep in touch with the parish, especially now that the parishes have merged and there are two schools, but I guess getting together with (the other Catholic school within the parish) for sacramental preparations and celebrations helps. We just have to keep working at it (G).

The recently published Archbishop's charter (2008), which all Catholic schools in the Archdiocese have to respond to in order to be granted a 'mandate to continue as a 'Catholic school', lists its second aim as, 'links to the parish'. This will ensure that 'keeping links to the parish community' stays on the agenda and will be an area for continued professional learning for staff.

#### *Summary of Key Understandings from Theme Four*

The data indicated that all participants believed that the best context for professional learning was the school site. Teachers believed that situating the learning on-site would ensure that more colleagues would be able to attend, in addition to feeling that this was the place that they felt more supported, as they had opportunities to work in teams. However, the most important reason for locating the learning at the school site, as determined by the participants, was to ensure that the learning was relevant to their learning needs.

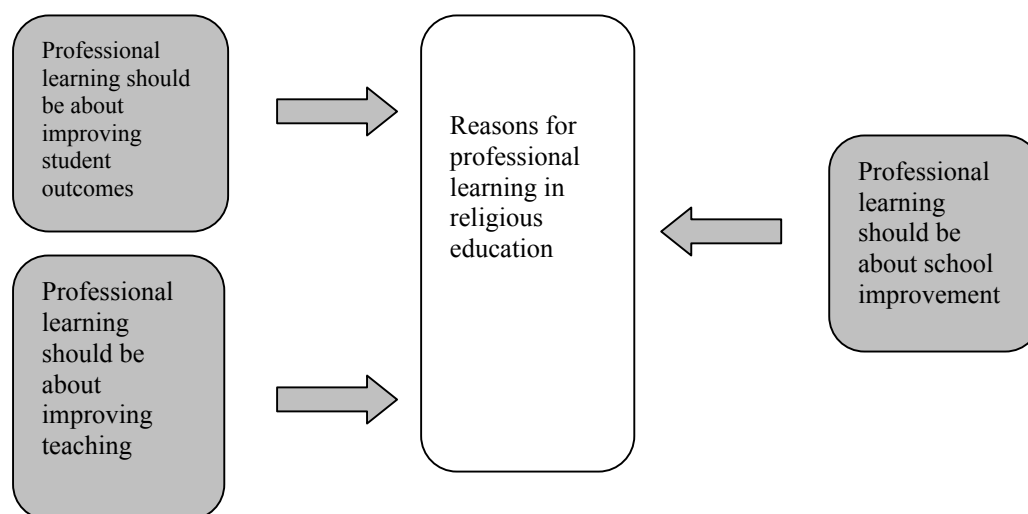
Participants also spoke about the importance of partnerships between the school and outside organisations. The CEO and Universities were mentioned, as it was believed that they could provide ‘expertise’ and support for schools. In addition to these partnerships, the parish community was mentioned as providing a ‘link’ between the professional learning at the school and the parish. In particular, the role of the parish priest was mentioned as supporting teachers and students during sacramental celebrations.

### Theme Five. Reasons for Professional Learning

#### *Introduction*

The fifth theme that emerged from the data outlined the reasons for participating in professional learning. During phase one, three perceived key understandings emerged. These three key understandings included: a) Professional learning should be about school improvement; b) Professional learning should be about improving student outcomes; and c) Professional learning should be about improving teaching. During phase two, no further key understandings emerged, however there was more in-depth discussion around the three perceived understandings that had previously emerged. It was during the second phase that participants also began making the links between student learning, teacher learning and school improvement.

Figure 5.5 outlines the theme, reasons for professional learning, and the three key understandings that emerged. All three are shaded as they emerged during the first phase.



*Figure 5.5. Reasons for professional learning in religious education*

*Professional Learning Should be Linked to Improving Student Outcomes*

In the second phase of data collection, participants were challenged to think about what it meant to improve student learning in religious education. Interview questions included: How do you know if student learning has improved in religious education? What measures do you use? The following discussion represents the thinking of participants:

C: In RE it is difficult. We want them (students) to have knowledge about RE. That's easy, we can assess knowledge, but we also want them to do something with it. We want children to be better people, to make better choices and decisions based on values. All these things can't be assessed, as many times we don't see what student have learnt. We want our students to understand more about their faith, but where do we start?

C: We need first to have the knowledge ourselves; I think that is the first big problem. We don't have the background.

R:<sup>31</sup> What do you mean?

C: I mean when we teach children we can teach them the knowledge part and we can assess them. Like we developed the rubrics for the tasks that we were assessing for the collaborative assessment. But we have to teach more than that don't we? Like we have to teach children how to put it into practice. You know, I

<sup>31</sup> R denotes researcher

want them to be able to do more than just know about the topic. They can already describe or retell the story. I want them to develop into really good people, and how do I know if I am meeting that standard or that outcome?

R: Do you mean that we also have to remember to ensure that we are teaching and therefore assessing an affective and spiritual outcome?

C: Yes. I think that is what I am saying, like in our lesson, I wanted them to know about Advent and the symbols. So we explored all the symbols and then I wanted the children to identify the Advent symbols. But I also wanted to give the children an opportunity to participate in the Advent liturgy and I wanted them to think about how the message of Advent could challenge them to think about how they deal with others.

R: So from what you are saying, do you believe that it would help you to have some further learning about teaching practices and pedagogies that would help you to integrate all three domains – the cognitive, affective and spiritual domains – into your teaching?

C: Yes but probably more about the teaching of the affective and spiritual. I am just using the outcomes that are listed in the resource banks as my assessment. But it's really hard when we don't have any standards to use. It was good when we wrote our own rubric for the unit. That made sense. We could really understand what we were looking for in assessment then. I don't really know if their learning has improved though. I know their knowledge has. I think learning improves for students when my teaching gets better.

I always have an assessment task as part of my unit. I use this task as my student assessment. The tasks are varied each term; I have included a comparison task, a written task and an aural presentation. The hardest part is trying to write and work out interesting tasks, so that they are not always the same. I think the students are improving, they know a lot more RE (N).

Schooling is about student achievement. Teachers teach students to become more powerful learners. Therefore one of the aims of professional learning is to focus on student achievement (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

What we do, has to improve the learning for our students (B).

Learning (RE) should be more interesting, if we continue to do exciting activities, children will want to participate (Q).

I think my questions are better, I am trying to ask more open-ended questions, not just the old yes /no answers (F).

There was no articulated understanding of what 'improved learning' would be like in religious education, and without a common or agreed upon understanding, participants

articulated their own understanding of improvement. These improvements included ideas about student participation and interest, teaching methodologies, completion of interesting tasks that involved thinking processes and more student involvement. Participants all believed that student learning was improving and they were basing their decisions on evidence from student involvement in class activities and discussion and work samples. As there was no pre-research, data it was impossible to make comparisons of student learning prior to the implementation of GNL.

To further analyse student learning and explore the themes that were generated from the data following the interview process and the earlier collaborative assessment protocols, classroom lessons were observed. These observations were completed in ten classrooms. Within five of the ten classrooms, the focus during the observation was ‘teacher talk’ and the observation was of teacher questioning. To gather this information, an adapted version of the Flanders’ Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC) was formulated (Hook, 1981). The researcher was particularly interested in finding out if teaching techniques/pedagogies were changing and if teachers were using questions beyond the ‘knowledge based’ type, to questions that involved the higher order thinking skills of comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

In the five classrooms observed using this particular assessment tool, the students were being introduced to a new topic or unit to be studied. The results indicated that only 1.4% of students were ‘off task’<sup>32</sup> for less than three minutes during the observation.

The data from the observations indicated that approximately 80% of the questions asked were concerned with student knowledge and comprehension of the particular topic and at least 10% of questions were about ‘application’, that is, the student’s ability to apply the skill or knowledge to a particular task. This meant that 10% of questions related to higher

---

<sup>32</sup> Participants indicated that these figures may be inflated due to the position of the ‘researcher’ i.e. Principal of the school.

order thinking, that is, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. In discussing this data with participants, they indicated that this was most likely due to the fact that a particular unit was being introduced and they were trying to establish what prior knowledge students already had about the particular topic.

Observations in another five classrooms included speaking to students who were completing a variety of tasks, as well as looking through student workbooks and discussing lessons with teachers. It was evident from these activities that students were engaged in a variety of activities and were obviously capable of completing the activities that had been assigned to them. These activities varied between the classes.

We are drawing the houses and the village where Jesus lived. The houses were made from stone, because there were lots of stones around. It was like a desert place that had lots of stones (grade 1 student).

This is the well, people had to get water from the well, so I will have to draw some water jugs, big jugs. People had to carry them. They were real heavy. I think strong people would carry them (grade 1 student).

This is the lady making the material for the clothes. They had to make their own material too. They could use fur from the animals or this material (grade 1 student).

We are putting our own symbols on the Jesse tree, not just the ones that we have learnt about. These symbols are important to us (grade 4 student).

It was evident from the classroom observations that students were engaged in challenging activities and were participating in all tasks.

In classroom observations the researcher also attempted to gather evidence to suggest that the collaborative examination of student work had improved the outcomes of student learning, or classroom instruction. Little evidence was found. However, in discussion with one teacher on the use of an assessment rubric, it was noted that this teacher had first used a rubric in designing the task for the collaborative assessment.

This is the third rubric I have now put together for my religion lessons. I have not only used them for assessment, but I give them to students to use, so that they know what is expected from them (O).

There is a need to be cautious when relying on data only from teachers' perceptions that learning is improving for students, because a teacher's perception of what is 'taught and learnt' by students may be different to what is being 'learnt' in the minds of students themselves (de Souza, 1999). No data was gathered from students to determine if they perceived that their learning had improved.

In addition to content knowledge, there is the added dimension that religious education is also about moral and spiritual education.

Whether or not personal learning occurs depends on the response of the learner and not on the intention and pedagogy of the teacher. The intention to educate young people spiritually and morally requires built in acknowledgment that ultimately a free personal response from the student is essential (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, p. 289).

Student achievement is influenced by a complex array of factors and it is difficult to isolate the effects of one factor. Meiers & Ingvarson (2003) stated that gathering evidence of changes in achievement requires a longitudinal approach, and as such change occurs over time, rather than with a single event. A related difficulty lies in identifying learning gains, some gains can be appropriately measured by standardised approaches; other significant gains may not be reflected in such assessments.

In this particular study, 'student improvement' ultimately equated to improvement in student participation in religious education lessons. In the short time that religious education classrooms were observed, students were engaged in thinking skills and activities in religious education lessons. If these were the criteria for measuring student improvement, then the outcomes were positive.



*Professional Learning Should be Concerned with Improving Teaching*

The literature indicated that student learning and teacher learning is linked, that the greatest factor in student achievement is the teacher, and that students in effective classrooms learn at four times the speed of those in least effective classrooms (Wiliam, 2007).

All participants were aware of the effect that they had on student learning and that teaching practices influenced student outcomes.

This should be our work, this learning we are doing needs to be our work. I mean it needs to happen more often. We have to get better at our teaching (C).

What we do has to improve the learning for our students (B).

We have to learn new ways and skills to make our teaching more challenging for our students (L).

All participants were aware that teaching influenced student learning. In earlier themes participants had identified the need to gain more knowledge about the subject matter in religious education, that is, information about their particular unit or topic, in addition to learning more about Scripture and theology to improve their teaching. Teachers need to know their subject content. One of the assumptions of professional learning is that increased teacher knowledge will improve teacher practice, and that will in turn translate into higher levels of student achievement (Supovitz, 2001).

In addition to content knowledge, teachers also need to develop their pedagogical skills. GNL outlined a pedagogical framework; this was to ensure that in addition to knowing about content, teachers knew about processes. As part of the professional learning process, teachers attended several workshop activities to ‘learn’ new teaching strategies that could be used in different units and contexts to develop student-thinking skills in religious education.

The thinking activities that I have trialled have helped my students understand the concepts a lot better. Yesterday we did the ‘scripture map’.<sup>33</sup> It went well. I am still working on the activities that we learnt from (Y), they were good. It makes

---

<sup>33</sup> Activity outlined in “Into the Deep” (White, 2005).

the children think. I just have to have all the materials organised and be ready to use them in my lesson (K).

The key variable in classrooms is not only about what teachers know, but what they do and their ability to develop student thinking (Wiliam, 2007). Once teachers have learned these skills they need ongoing support and opportunities for practice and reflection.

I hope that we can do this again; it was good to work with others. I learnt a lot and I want to try some of the things. I want to do that in the next unit. Then I could see if the student learning is any better (D).

I wish we could have someone come around and work with us in the classroom, like we did when we had all the literacy activities. (V) modelled the activities first, then we had a go, and she would stay and help us (D).

Teacher learning has to focus on both content and process. That is, it needs to focus on pedagogical knowledge about how best to teach that subject matter content, as well as develop student thinking (Marzano, 2003b). Professional learning needs to focus on what we want teachers to change and then support them in making the changes (Wiliam, 2007).

### *Professional Learning Should be Linked to School Improvement*

As previously mentioned, participants spoke of the need to ensure that professional learning was identified in the school improvement process. This was discussed and analysed in chapter four. Although no new data emerged during the second phase, it is noteworthy that the perceived understanding emerged from the data on several occasions.

I think it's important that the professional learning we do is part of our school plan and that way we are sure that we have identified what we want to achieve (A).

### *Summary of Key Understanding from Theme Five*

Professional learning needs to focus on improving the learning outcomes for students. When identifying professional learning activities it is important to determine what 'improved

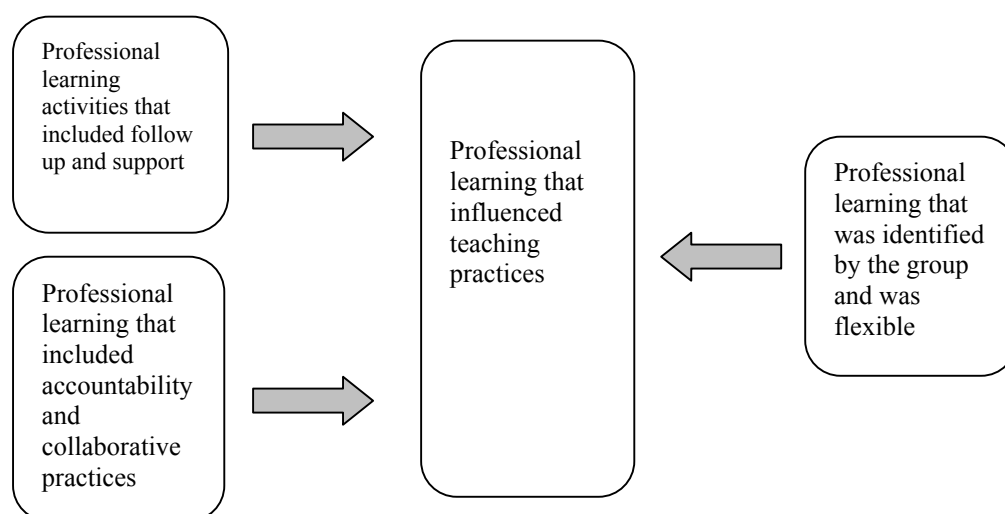
learning’ would look like for students in the religious education classroom. In an attempt to improve ‘outcomes for students’ and to align religious education to other key learning areas, teachers were aware that religious education was about teaching for understanding but it was also more than this; Religious education was also about evoking a commitment and deriving personal meaning (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).

Professional learning needs to improve teaching. This includes both the content of the subject matter and the process of teaching it. Improving the content of religious education would include improving teachers’ knowledge of their subject matter; the background knowledge of particular units or topics, which includes theology and Scripture. In addition to having content or subject matter knowledge, teachers also need to develop pedagogical skills that influence teaching and learning. Teachers need to develop a repertoire of pedagogical skills that will challenge student thinking (White, 2004).

#### Theme Six. Professional Learning that Influenced Teacher Practice

##### *Introduction*

During phase two, group discussions focused on strategies that teachers identified as influencing their practice. Within this theme, three perceived key understandings emerged: a) Professional learning activities that included follow up and support; b) Professional learning that included accountability and collaborative practices; and c) Professional learning that was identified and determined by the group and was flexible. Figure 5.6 outlines the theme and the perceived key understandings that emerged.



*Figure 5.6. Professional learning that influenced teaching practices*

#### *Professional Learning Activities that Included Follow Up and Support*

77% of participants indicated that professional learning that included follow up and support was a key understanding that influenced their teaching practice. In discussing ‘follow up and support’, participants indicated that this did not occur in the religious education professional learning model. Participants believed that follow up and support should be individualised and that this learning should occur in the classroom. Two different models were used in the implementation of the literacy project and participants have referred to these in discussions.

D: When (V) came into our classrooms to model the lessons, we would watch and then we would have a go ourselves and she would watch us give the lesson. This made us really do it, we would have to think about it and really plan it. I did it because I knew some one was going to come in and follow up. I guess I shouldn’t say it really, but I wouldn’t necessarily try anything new if someone was not going to check up on me. I think I really need someone to follow up with me.

R.<sup>34</sup> Who do you think could take on the role of ‘someone’ to follow up?

<sup>34</sup> R denotes researcher

D: Well (V) did it for literacy, but if she can't do it, I guess we could do it for each other if we were really working in teams, but we really don't trust each enough I don't think. Not yet anyway. We might get there. I guess it's still only early days.

When I had (RR, SS)<sup>35</sup> come into my classroom to see my program in action, I did some of my best teaching on those days. I also did some really good work when I had my student teacher. Now that we have parents come in to help in our literacy program I am always ensuring that I do some really good work. I think, I would have to say when someone is in my room, would be the times that I would really do my best teaching (E).

Participants indicated that they need support and opportunities for follow-up. This support as noted by teachers included coaching, lesson observation, lesson modelling, teaming and mentoring and could be provided from outside expertise but could also be provided from peers. The data also indicated that participants needed opportunities to 'go over' their skills, 'share' them with colleagues, student teachers, or parents within their classroom. If any 'change', such as a teaching idea, activity or skill is not supported then it is less likely to be sustained (Fullan, 1991).

### *Professional Learning that Included Accountability and Collaborative Practices*

From the data, it emerged that collaborative practices held participants accountable to one another. They believed this to be a key understanding in changing their teaching practices. Participants spoke about having attended various workshops and seminars and learning new skills, feeling very enthusiastic about trying out what they had learnt, but soon reverting to their usual practices as new learning or 'new skills' were difficult to sustain.

M: I learnt those new teaching strategies when I attended the in-service with (EE).

R:<sup>36</sup> Did you use them in your classroom?

M: Yes I tried them out, and made lots of the aids for the other activities...

R: What units did you use the activities for this year?

M: No, I haven't used them this year.

---

<sup>35</sup> Teachers from other schools

<sup>36</sup> R denotes researcher

M: I think I just got too busy, doing other things...

In further discussions, 83% of participants believed that if they learnt new skills within the group, then collegial and collaborative practices would ensure that they continue with the particular skill or strategy that they had learnt. This practice also ensured that they had colleagues with whom they could discuss and share ideas. This discussion also highlighted collaborative practices of programming and planning, in which colleagues had the opportunity to assist one another with ideas for their teaching. Collaborative assessment also featured in discussion. Participants believed that this provided a professional 'dialogue'. In addition to professional dialogue, the use of the protocol gave the professional conversation a structure. Collaborative assessment provided teachers with a forum and a set time for reflection on student work, student learning, and their own teaching (Allen & Blythe, 2004; Blythe et al., 2008 ).

*Professional Learning that was Identified by the Group and was Flexible*

A final key understanding that emerged from the data was that all participants wanted to identify the professional learning that was relevant to their needs. In this way, participants had the opportunity to identify and target areas that they believed would improve their teaching they also suggested that professional learning needed flexibility. In outlining flexibility, participants indicated that professional learning should be 'part of their work', and therefore, learning would be better if it was 'site based'. Additionally, participants believed that 'flexible' professional learning meant that the learning could change as the needs of the learners changed.

If we decided that we needed to improve the spelling skills of students, then we would have to find out what we wanted to improve. We would use the data that we have, and then we would look at ways that we could address the areas that we believed would improve the spelling skills of students (P).

In planning professional learning activities participants need to gather data and evidence of the student learning that needs improvement. After identifying the areas for improvement, activities need to be planned that will help teachers to implement strategies that will assist the students' learning to improve. This cycle of continuous improvement becomes part of the schools' cycle of professional learning.

### *Summary of Key Understandings from Theme Six*

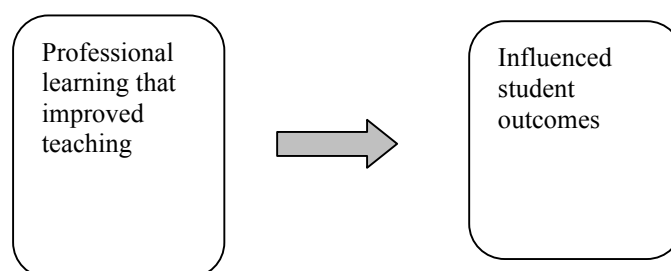
Three understandings about professional learning that influenced teaching practices emerged from the data. This included the need for individuals to have the opportunity to identify their own specific needs in professional learning. Professional learning needed to include flexibility to ensure that the learning needs of both the teachers and the students are met. Participants indicated that in order to change and sustain any new practices that were being implemented, they needed ongoing follow up and support. Colleagues could provide this, but there was also an indication that 'expertise' was needed to ensure that the new learning was implemented accurately.

Participants also indicated that professional learning needed to include collaborative practices. In outlining various collaborative processes that were perceived by participants as influencing their teaching practices, they highlighted the fact that collaborative processes ensured that they were held accountable for their learning. In this case, they were accountable to their professional learning groups. These groups made teachers feel not only more accountable, but also supported within their efforts.

## Theme Seven. Professional Learning That Influenced Student Outcomes

### *Introduction*

During the interviews that were held at the conclusion of phase two, participants were asked what they perceived as having the biggest influence on improving learning for students. Participants outlined various activities which they perceived as influencing their behaviours and choices for teaching using particular skills. These particular activities have previously been discussed in the analysis of data. The perceived understanding that emerged from the data was that all participants believed that the teacher was the biggest influence on student achievement, and therefore it was imperative that professional learning improved teaching. Figure 5.7 outlines the key understanding and the theme.



*Figure 5.7. Professional learning that influenced student outcomes*

### *Professional Learning that Improved Teaching*

Participants were asked to outline the professional learning experiences they perceived as having impacted on student learning in their classrooms. During the discussions that followed, many outlined the various workshops and opportunities that they had participated in during the twelve months of the study, in addition to learning in other key learning areas.



In the workshop with (Y) we learnt new strategies and activities for teaching different RE concepts. They were good. He also gave us the little booklet and then we had a disc with lots more ideas on it. So that we had more to choose from (I).

I think when (V) came to work with us I learnt the most. She came in and modelled the lesson, then we had a chance to try it, to practice, then she came back and we had time to sit down and talk with her again and plan. But we also did this with our co-teacher and then sometimes in out teaching teams which was good (D).

The particular learning activities and strategies that emerged from the data included an extended list of workshops and activities in which participants had previously participated. The three most consistent understandings were those that emerged during the previous theme. These included: a) Professional learning activities should include follow up and support; b) Professional learning should include accountability and collaborative practices; and c) The content of professional learning should be identified by the group and be flexible. The discussion that extended from this initial list of workshops and activities indicated that participants came to their own conclusion that it was their teaching that influenced student learning.

It wasn't the ideas or the activities that changed student learning. We had to use them. The activities helped me to think about how I was teaching. It is my teaching that got better, or I hope got better... so it is the teaching that changed student learning (I).

Working with others helped me to be a better teacher. It helped me to think about how students were learning. When I started to think about how they were learning, my teaching became more focused on them. So I was more focused on how they were learning, instead of teaching all the content. I think if my focus is on learning, then the learning has to get better for the students, and they will improve. My expectations are higher, I expect them to improve (D).

There were lots of workshops and activities that we participated in, and we all liked different ones. That's because we all have different learning preferences and styles. I guess we can't please everyone all the time. But what we do have to do, is please everyone some of the time. We have to find the activities that are going to make a difference, I mean to the individual teacher. Because that teacher has to change their teaching and find new ways of making sure that every child is learning in that classroom. It is the teacher's teaching that makes a difference to the learning of the students (P).

The data indicated that participants believed that professional learning opportunities had to impact on teaching skills and practices. The learning opportunities should be providing opportunities for teachers to learn skills and strategies that they could use in the classroom. Teachers needed to believe that these ‘new skills and strategies’ could influence and improve the student learning in their classroom.

### *Summary of Key Understandings from Theme Seven*

Participants were asked to identify the characteristics of professional learning that they perceived to influence student-learning outcomes. In defining these characteristics, participants identified the characteristics of a list of activities that influenced their teaching. Many of these key characteristics were outlined in theme six. In the final analysis of this data, participants indicated that professional learning could not influence student learning outcomes. Professional learning could influence their teaching and, in turn, it was their teaching that affected student learning.

### **Conclusion**

The implementation of the new guidelines (GNL) demanded that teachers learn new curriculum materials in addition to new teaching pedagogies. In implementing these new curriculum documents and teaching strategies, it was understood that student achievement in religious education would improve.

To assist in the implementation of GNL, CEO personnel provided a variety of in-service and workshop activities. In addition to these initiatives and support, a professional learning plan was designed by school teaching staff and implemented into the school’s professional learning plan. This plan included a variety of professional learning activities,

strategies and workshops as determined by participants. During the implementation of the various professional learning opportunities, data was gathered to determine the characteristics of effective professional learning. Effective professional learning was determined as being professional learning that improved the teaching skills and practices of teachers, that in turn improved the learning outcomes of students. Seven themes emerged from the data during the second phase. Five themes had previously emerged during phase one, however, additional understandings and/or information emerged during this second phase.

Participants spoke readily about the learning opportunities in which they had participated and they identified these as leading to changes in their practice. This conversation led to the emergence of two additional themes: a) The professional learning that influenced teaching practices and b) Professional learning that improved student outcomes. The particular changes to teaching practices that were identified by participants included participating in collaborative activities that demanded accountability and provided flexible follow up and support.

Participants acknowledged that working in collaborative teams ensured that new learning was sustained over a period of time. It was identified that working in collaborative structures ensured that teachers were accountable to the 'group'. The new learning also needed follow up and support. Participants noted that a 'one off' opportunity did not lead to any long lasting change to teaching behaviours. The data also indicated that professional learning needed to be 'flexible' so that the needs of all participants were met (William, 2007). Figure 5.1 outlines the seven themes and key understandings that emerged from the data.

*Table 5.1 Summary of themes and key understandings from the data*

Theme	Key Understandings
<p>Theme one:</p> <p>Change and professional learning – the school environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The need to create a culture of ‘change’.</li> <li>• The need to sustain the change. Change needs time.</li> <li>• The need to create a supportive environment.</li> <li>• The need to create a sense of purpose.</li> <li>• The need to link change processes.</li> <li>• ‘Change’ needs to be linked to improvement.</li> </ul>
<p>Theme two:</p> <p>The content of professional learning in religious education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional learning should be needs based and include content knowledge of the unit to be taught.</li> <li>• Professional learning needs to address the teachings skills of ‘best practice’.</li> <li>• Professional learning needs to address relevant topics.</li> <li>• Professional learning needs to include supportive texts and resources.</li> <li>• Professional learning needs to include, theology, Scripture and spirituality.</li> </ul>
<p>Theme three:</p> <p>The structure and design of professional learning in religious education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional learning should include the principles of collaborative learning.</li> <li>• Professional learning should consider adult learning styles and theories.</li> <li>• Professional learning should use protocols and professional language or dialogue.</li> <li>• Professional learning should be ongoing and supported.</li> <li>• Professional learning should be presented by credible speakers.</li> </ul>
<p>Theme four:</p> <p>The context of professional learning in religious education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional learning should be school based.</li> <li>• Professional learning should be linked with outside professional organisations such as the Catholic Education Office and Universities.</li> <li>• Professional learning should be linked to the parish community.</li> </ul>
<p>Theme five:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional learning should improve student outcomes.</li> </ul>

The reasons for professional learning in religious education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional learning should be about improving teaching.</li> <li>• Professional learning should be linked to school improvement.</li> </ul>
Theme six:  Professional learning that influenced teaching practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional learning that included accountability and collaborative practices.</li> <li>• Professional learning that included follow up and support.</li> <li>• Professional learning that had clear and defined purposes.</li> </ul>
Theme seven:  Professional learning that influenced student outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional learning that improved teaching.</li> </ul>

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the characteristics of effective professional learning for teachers of religious education and determine which particular activities influenced teaching practices, which in turn improved student outcomes. As a qualitative study situated in the epistemology of social constructivism, it drew upon symbolic interactionism as the theoretical perspective. The study utilised structured and unstructured interviews, conversations, survey instruments and classroom observations with teachers from a particular Catholic primary school in the archdiocese of Tasmania. This data was then interpreted according to the principles of grounded theory. As a result of this undertaking, this study developed perceived key understandings and analysed several issues concerning the characteristics of effective professional learning as determined by teachers of religious education who participated in this study. The study also identified professional learning factors that had an impact on the pedagogical skills of teachers, which in turn affected classroom learning for students. This final chapter begins by analysing the theory generated for each research question and recommendations as a result of the study are made. It then considers the significance and limitations of the research. Prior to the conclusion of this thesis some recommendations for further research are made.

#### Characteristics of Effective Professional Learning in Religious Education

##### *Introduction*

The specific research question that generated the data that was analysed in Chapters four and five was: What are the perceived characteristics of effective professional learning in

religious education? Participants in the study were required to implement new guidelines (GNL) into their religious education program. The Archbishop of Tasmania mandated this change. The CEO provided some professional learning support to assist teachers in this implementation phase. Participants were aware that the use of the new curriculum materials would require them to change their teaching practices. In participating in these activities, teachers expressed the need to create a culture of learning within the school. This culture of learning was not only concerned with student learning, but also included the need for teachers to learn (Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007). This learning would require structuring schools as learning organisations that support continuous professional learning for educators (DuFour et al., 2005c). As teachers undertook this new learning they indicated that it was important that a supportive environment be created (Joyce & Showers, 2002). In defining the characteristics of effective professional learning in religious education participants described the a) structure, b) context and c) presenters.

### *The Structure of Professional Learning*

Participants indicated that two of the most prominent features that should be included in any professional learning design was the need for collaborative learning processes (Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Kagan, 1994) and the inclusion of adult learning principles (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b; Tallerico, 2005). Within the elements of collaborative design, participants believed that it was important to develop a professional dialogue. This professional dialogue informed their conversations as they participated in collaborative processes. The use of protocols offered teachers this dialogue. Participants were aware that a variety of protocols were available to them and they had opportunities to develop their own protocols to assist in the process of collaborative analysis of student work (Allen & Blythe, 2004; Blythe et al., 2008). This collaborative team process provided an ideal process for

continuous professional learning (Fullan, 2005b). Within this collaborative design teachers needed to feel supported. The teachers indicated that the support needed to come from various levels: the school, the system (CEO), universities and the parish (Fullan et al., 2006). Teachers indicated that the environment needed to provide them with opportunities to work in collaboration to trial new pedagogies, in addition to opportunities for on-going learning. In describing this support, teachers indicated that they learnt through opportunities to work with colleagues but they also needed 'follow up' visits from the workshop presenters of the 'new learning'. In this follow up activity, teachers spoke about the importance of seeing the theory that was presented put into practice. In describing this activity, teachers spoke of the need to have the new learning modelled for them in addition to having opportunities to trial the new practices. This new collaborative way of working together in a learning community (DuFour, 2004; DuFour et al., 2005a) would take time. Teachers needed time to work together, trial new ideas and skills, and to change teaching practices to those that would better support student learning (Fullan, 1991; Loucks-Horsley et al., 1998). Participants working within this collaborative team indicated that they were more likely to sustain any 'new practice' as the team ensured accountability. Being a member of the team meant that participants were accountable to one another.

In the implementation of GNL teachers were beginning to link pedagogical changes across subject disciplines. This allowed them to transfer new pedagogical knowledge and skills across key disciplines. Furthermore, participants believed that if they implemented any change within their program, this change should equate to improvement for students (Guskey, 2002). The fundamental changes that the new guidelines (GNL) should have addressed include: a) To improve teacher knowledge and b) To improve teaching practices. It was anticipated that these would in turn increase student knowledge and understanding. If these aims were met, teachers believed that it would result in a change for the better.



### *Context of Professional Learning*

Participants believed that the best possible venue for ongoing professional learning was the school site. It was believed that this would ensure that all staff would have the opportunity to participate. In naming the school site as the best possible venue for professional learning, participants indicated that it provided opportunities to work in collaborative teams. It is important to note that participants were talking about ‘ongoing’ professional learning. This included the weekly-organised professional learning activities. Research participants did have opportunities to participate in ‘spirituality days’ and other professional learning workshops that, by design, are not held at the school site. Participants indicated that they learnt from these experiences, but they were not mentioned during the interviews as opportunities that affected teaching practices. The fact that they were not mentioned does not indicate that they do not affect learning. The research identified professional learning practices that sustained change and affected teaching practice; therefore in this instance the ‘one-off’ experiences were not detailed.

Participants did indicate that the school’s professional learning program needed to align with outside organisations such as universities, CEO (systemic initiatives) and the parish. In this instance participants believed that they would learn from ‘outside’ experts. The venue for this learning was not a part of the discussion. It is noteworthy that participants need to participate in these activities to gain and maintain accreditation to teach in a Catholic school. In addition to forming partnerships with these outside organisations, participants outlined the need to ensure that links to the parish were maintained in these times of increasing difficulties, as parish boundaries were changing, parish priest numbers were declining and Mass attendance amongst both students and staff members was declining.

### *Presenters of Professional Learning*

The participants reported that the way professional learning was presented could significantly influence professional learning. In particular, it was suggested that the presenter's credibility, enthusiasm and ability to support participants throughout the program would influence their decision to accept and implement any ideas that were being presented.

This notion of presentation is particularly significant because within the school context, the role of professional learning in religious education is often a role expectation of the REC. In most instances, this particular role is not outlined in the role description of the REC, nor is there training provided to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to perform this task.

## Professional Learning Perceived as Influencing the Growth of Teachers of Religious Education

### *Introduction*

The second research question that focused the data gathering and the analysis reported in Chapters four and five was: What factors associated with religious education professional learning do teachers perceive as influencing their growth? This section summarises the findings of the research in relation to this question.

Historically, professional learning in religious education in Tasmanian Catholic schools consisted of teachers attending in-services, workshops and/or seminars. Either the Pastoral Institute or the CEO provided these opportunities. In implementing GNL, the support from the CEO consisted of workshops and seminars. The presenter of the professional learning activities planned the content of these workshops and/or seminars. In addition to

this, CEO personnel worked with the school's REC to identify school needs. This support included a visit from CEO personnel at least once per term.

The ways in which professional learning activities have an impact on teaching programs and practices are complex. The research has indicated that change occurs over time and is difficult to identify (Fullan, 2005b). Participants came to the realisation that their teaching had the biggest influence on a students' learning. Therefore, if the aim was to improve learning, then teaching needed to improve. Roland Barth, (1991) stated:

God didn't create self-contained classrooms. Fifty-minute periods, subjects taught in isolation. We did – because we find working alone safer than and preferable to working together. We can work to change the embedded structures so that our schools become more hospitable places for student and adult learning. But little will really change unless we change ourselves (p. 125).

Within the research project, participants identified three characteristics of effective professional learning as the factors that influenced their professional growth or their learning. These were a) the structure, b) the content and c) the presenter.

### *The Structure*

Participants indicated that within the structure of the professional learning program, they needed support and opportunities for follow-up and skill sharing. It was believed that this support could be provided from outside expertise and from peers. If any 'change', such as a teaching idea, activity or skill is not supported then it is less likely to be sustained (Fullan, 1991). Collaborative practices were seen to be key in changing teaching practices. Collegial and collaborative practices ensured that teachers continued to use the particular skill or strategy that they had learnt, in addition to programming and planning together. Collaborative assessment provided opportunities for professional dialogue. In addition to professional dialogue, the use of the protocol (Blythe et al., 2008) gave the professional conversation a structure. Collaborative practices provided teachers with a forum and a set

time for reflection on student work, student learning and their own teaching. Professional learning needed flexibility. In outlining flexibility, research participants indicated that professional learning should be ‘part of their work’ and therefore, learning would be better if it was ‘site based’ (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Furthermore, ‘flexible’ professional learning meant that the learning could change as the needs of the learners changed. In planning professional learning activities it was important to gather data and evidence of the student learning that needed improvement. After identifying the areas for improvement, activities needed to be planned that helped teachers to implement strategies that would assist the students’ learning to improve. This cycle of continuous improvement becomes part of the schools’ cycle of professional learning (Fullan et al., 2006).

### *The Content*

Participants in the research indicated that they believed that it was important to be involved in determining the content and the processes involved in the professional learning program in which they were expected to participate. The content of the professional learning needed to be relevant to their work and teaching of religious education. This included the need to have a good understanding of the subject matter and the subject pedagogy. Hence, in religious education this would include providing structured sustained and focused opportunities for students to generate their own religious meanings that have been informed by the Catholic tradition and their relevant life experiences (White, 2004). This remains problematic, when many teachers in Tasmania are recruited from the University of Tasmania (UTAS) to teach religious education and do not have any formal training in the teaching of religious education. The CEO is attempting to address this specific problem in offering the Graduate Certificate in Religious Education in partnership with ACU. Participants in this research did not believe that they understood all the content matter of GNL and there was an

emphasis on participants wanting to be involved in professional learning that included theology, Scripture, and background and content knowledge of the units of work as outlined in the resource banks.

### *The Presenter*

The participants indicated that it was important that the presenter of the professional learning, regardless of whether the presenter was from within the organisation (REC or peer teacher) or from outside the organisation, was credible and able to provide the appropriate support. Furthermore, participants indicated that this support needed to be ongoing.

### Religious Education Professional Learning Activities that Changed Teacher Behaviour and Influenced Student Learning

The third research question that focused the data gathering and analysis was: What religious education professional learning activities were perceived as changing teacher behaviour and influencing student learning? Participants indicated that the reason for participating in professional learning was to improve student learning and outcomes (DuFour et al., 2005a). Linked to this concept was the fact that to improve student learning, teaching practices needed to improve. Teaching both affects and effects student learning, therefore the only way to improve student outcomes was to ensure that the teaching skills of teachers improved. This included subject matter content and subject teaching pedagogies, or teaching skills. However, as previously mentioned, teaching religious education needs to address even more than teaching the appropriate content knowledge and understanding. It also needs to evoke a personal commitment and derive personal meaning for students (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).

Evaluating the impact of professional learning on student achievement is difficult for a variety of methodological reasons. Separating out a single component such as classroom teaching pedagogy poses challenges. Student achievement is a complex process influenced by many factors and it is difficult to isolate the effects of one factor. Meiers & Ingvarson's (2003) research indicated that gathering evidence of changes in achievement required a longitudinal approach, and as such, change occurs over time not as a single event. In this research project, a variety of data gathering techniques were used. Data relating to student outcomes and achievement was gathered during classroom observations, moderation and collaborative assessment processes. Student work was analysed and teacher discussion and interview data was gathered over a twelve-month period. The data revealed that participants and students themselves believed that they were participating in more academically challenging activities during religious education. Students participating in the activities were reported as being more motivated and engaged and indicated that they enjoyed the activities. A related difficulty in determining student outcomes lies in identifying learning or educational gains. Some educational gains can be appropriately measured by standardised approaches; however in religious education, gains may not be reflected in such standardised assessments. It is possible to test 'knowledge' gains and various Australian States are engaged in such processes. For the purpose of this research, this was not undertaken.

In determining which particular professional learning activities influenced student achievement, participants came to the conclusion that professional learning could only influence teaching practices, and in turn, teaching practices could influence student learning. Participants indicated that this cycle of professional learning to improve teaching practices needed to be incorporated into the school's annual improvement plan. Participants indicated that the challenge required them to focus on learning and working collaboratively on issues

related to learning, rather than teaching. Within this new environment, educators need to do things differently to ensure that all students are learning at high levels.

### Summary of Theory Generated

There was a very high level of consistency between the factors perceived by research participants as affecting their growth and influencing their teaching practices, and those identified in the research literature. This is not surprising, given that the literature represents several studies of professional learning programs. There were no ‘new’ factors reported by participants, although the role of collaboration and the use of protocols in providing the vehicle and language for the collaborative process featured within the research project. Table 6.1 summarises the theory generated within the study.

*Table 6.1 Theory generated from the study.*

Research Question	Theory Generated
1. What are the characteristics of effective professional learning in religious education?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Collaborative learning practices and processes.</li> <li>▪ Adult learning theories.</li> <li>▪ Time.</li> <li>▪ Professional learning that was site based and supported by ‘expertise’.</li> <li>▪ Content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge.</li> <li>▪ Theory and practice.</li> </ul>
2. What professional learning activities affected the growth of teachers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative processes that used protocols to develop a professional dialogue.</li> <li>• Supportive structures including developing links with outside organisations.</li> <li>• Time to practice and trial new pedagogies.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content knowledge and pedagogical skills.</li> </ul>
3. What professional growth of teachers affected the growth of student learning ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reason for professional learning was to improve student learning.</li> <li>• Change the focus from teaching to student learning.</li> <li>• Professional learning activities that changed and improved teaching practices also improved student-learning outcomes.</li> </ul>

### Recommendations from Research Questions

The study's findings have generated the recommendations and implications for the work of providers of teacher professional learning.

### *Responsibility for Religious Education*

This curriculum change and implementation of new guidelines (GNL) was mandated by the archdiocese of Tasmania. The CEO strategic plan identified that the curriculum was to be implemented into all schools within the archdiocese over a three year period. Religious education curriculum advisors were appointed by the CEO to work within Tasmanian regions to support schools and ensure that GNL was appropriately implemented. In addition to the archdiocesan and systemic responsibilities for implementing GNL, the school was also responsible for its implementation. At a school level, this task was overseen by the Principal and the leadership team and coordinated by the REC.

It is recommended that those responsible for the implementation of any 'change' process be adequately informed about the change and change management strategies, in addition to knowledge about the characteristics of effective professional learning.



### *Change Process*

One of the essential characteristics of effective professional learning is that it involves a 'change' process. It is recommended that Principals, RECs, CEO personnel and all who design professional learning programs are aware of change elements and research that affect the learning of participants within particular programs. In implementing change in religious education, it is imperative that the Religious Education Coordinator, who is often left with the responsibility of this task within the school, is also aware. Elements within the change process that would require specific understandings include the need to create a culture within the organisation. A culture of learning needs to be developed amongst participants and they need to feel supported throughout the process. This culture would need a specific purpose. The reason for adopting any change needs to be clarified and articulated. The culture would also need to focus on 'learning'; learning for both teachers and students. The culture needs to embrace and support change. Any change takes time and should be an incremental process. Time needs to be allocated for implementation, in addition for time to sustain the change.

### *Content of Professional Learning*

It is recommended that the participants identify the content of the professional learning program. The content needs to be contextualised and meet the needs of the educators within the organisation. It is also recommended that the professional learning include opportunities for subject content knowledge in addition to subject pedagogical skills. In delivering professional learning in religious education, it is imperative that personnel delivering the program are aware of the needs of participants. At a school level it would be expected that the REC be involved in this process.

*Structure of Professional Learning*

It is recommended that professional learning include collaborative learning processes. This includes opportunities for participants to collaboratively programme, plan and assess student work. This daily habit of working together is an opportunity to build capacity within the organisation (Blythe et al., 2008; Fickel, 2002; Fullan, 2005a). At the core of this type of professional learning within schools is the focus on collaborative problem solving (Fickel, 2002). Through various activities, teachers identify issues of common concern and then work collaboratively to identify causes and generate potential solutions and strategies appropriate to their local school context. Solutions may or may not include securing external resources. As teachers attempt to implement changes based on their collaborative learning and problem solving, they require sustained, ongoing support if they are to achieve changes to their individual and collective practice. The collaborative culture within the school can provide this support.

It is also recommended as part of the collaborative culture that is developed, that schools encourage teachers to develop a professional dialogue when participating in collaborative opportunities. The participants can develop guided conversations that include protocols for such activities and a variety of protocols as outlined by Blythe et al., (2008) can be adapted. It is also possible for participants to develop their own protocols that may be more relevant to their particular situations. These collaborative working opportunities cannot be learnt from a workshop or course. “You need to learn it by doing it and getting better at it on purpose” (Fullan, 2005a, p. 23).

### *Context of Professional Learning*

It is recommended that the best place for professional learning for teachers is the school site. However, as there is a need for all communities to ensure that there is continual growth within the organization, there will be a need to seek outside expertise. This expertise can be sourced from various organisations, including the CEO, Universities and other schools and the parish community. It is also recommended that the particular professional learning be contextualised for each particular school. Just because a particular feature or research indicator is successful in one school, this does not ensure that it will be successful in another context with other teachers.

### *Reasons for Participating in Professional Learning*

It is recommended that professional learning be linked to improving the learning outcomes for students. The teacher has the biggest influence on student learning (Black & William, 1998), therefore it is recommended that the professional learning should target the improvement of the knowledge and skills of the teacher. It is also recommended that these improvements be part of the schools annual improvement plan.

### *Role of the Presenters of Professional Learning in Religious Education*

The study highlighted the influence of the presenter on the role of teacher growth. Participants indicated that the presenter had an impact on the overall effectiveness of the program. These findings have implications for those responsible for selecting and training presenters. The selection and training of presenters is critical to supporting teacher professional growth. In the school context the key person is the REC, but within the collegial model this responsibility lies with all teaching staff. It is suggested that the characteristics as

identified within this study could inform the process of training presenters at the school level in the implementation of professional learning activities.

### Significance and Limitations of the Research

Whilst arguing that the professional learning model presented and applied in this thesis has potentially wider implications, the limits of the study must be acknowledged. The nature of a grounded theory approach, combined with a small participant group and the design limitations (such as the position of power held by the researcher as Principal of the school in which the research was undertaken, the objectivity of the researcher, and the researcher being ultimately responsible for the professional learning that occurred in the school) all suggest caution. Trials and further assessment should be used when seeking to generalise the findings of the research project both within Tasmania and beyond the Tasmanian context.

Due to the time frame and limitations of the study, much of the research on ‘student improvement’ is based on teacher perceptions and reports. Studies by Meiers & Ingvarson (2003) indicated that it is reasonable to place a certain level of confidence in questionnaires and interviews that rely on teacher’s reports and perceptions about their practice and there is little reason to think that their responses might be biased.

Another significant limitation of the approach was the relatively short period of time to gather the data on improved outcomes. The evidence was collected from classroom observation and teacher interviews. As observation data was not recorded at the beginning of the first phase there was no opportunity to make comparative conclusions. The study reflected the difficulty in obtaining evidence of the impact of professional learning on student outcomes and reinforces the recognition of the research literature of the need for longitudinal studies to finding evidence of the link (Meiers & Ingvarson, 2003).

While there were some limitations to this study, there were also some strengths associated with the research design. One key element used in the research approach was the use of the two phases of data collection. This opportunity allowed the participants to review and refine the professional learning process prior to undertaking the second professional learning phase. This approach affirmed the identified characteristics of professional learning.

This research is the first study to explore the links between professional learning, teaching practices and improved student outcomes in religious education in a Catholic school in Australia. This thesis advances knowledge through the presentation of new research in this area. It has applied existing knowledge about professional learning to the area of religious education in a Catholic school, therefore producing knowledge upon which advances may be built.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

No research project ever completes the study within a particular field. This study was limited to focus on the professional learning of teachers in one particular school. There are possibilities for research to be conducted with a larger participant group across several schools. Although the participant group involved in this study offered a relatively good cross section, it would be interesting to discover if the findings would be similar in a larger participant group.

As noted, the collection of data to determine improvement to student learning outcomes was limited to classroom observation and teacher reports. It would be possible for future studies to concentrate on students, classrooms and student work samples. With the development of appropriate evaluative rubrics and collaborative assessment strategies, the impact of teacher learning and the use of pedagogical skills that result in enhanced student

outcomes could be measured. This would assist teachers and curriculum designers in knowing what particular methodologies were effective in the classroom.

Further research in religious education could also be completed around what Fickel (2002) outlined as pedagogical content knowledge. Pedagogical content knowledge has four key components. The first component is a teacher's overarching concept of teaching religious education. This is the conceptual map that is used for the subject matter. It outlines the connections between the key concepts and the ways of doing things within the subject-matter field. It is this map that serves as the basis for making instructional decisions, determining learning goals and objectives, and selecting student learning. In addition to this, the teacher needs the knowledge of the instructional strategies or pedagogies that can be used to illuminate the key concepts. Past curriculum and guideline documents have separated the content from the pedagogy, and although shown as an overlap in GNL, teachers have a limited understanding of the link between the two. This could then be further analysed in order to understand the link between this knowledge and improved student outcomes.

Research in religious education could also involve the study of the necessary 'new knowledge' and how to use the 'new knowledge' to engage teachers to reflect on their beliefs, experiences and habits in order to effect change. Teachers need opportunities to see clear benefits between what they are learning and their own classroom situations (Hawley & Valli, 1999).

A further research challenge could be to investigate the religious education outcomes for students. This was identified in the work and research of Blythe, Powell & Allen (2008).

More studies are needed to investigate outcomes for students and teachers of ongoing collaborative examination of student work. Research consistently demonstrates the value that teachers themselves attach to opportunities to collaborate with colleagues in examining and reflecting on teaching and learning within their classrooms (Blythe et al., 2008, p. 8).

This particular challenge in religious education could involve the identification of standards when participating in moderation and other collaborative assessment exercises.

### Conclusion

The implementation of new religious education guidelines (GNL) in the archdiocese of Hobart provided an opportunity to develop and study a 'school based' professional learning model to support teachers as they implemented the curriculum material. As a result of the study, key understandings of effective strategies of professional learning that improved teachers' professional knowledge and in turn, improved learning outcomes for students, were identified.

Rather than as a 'single event', professional learning was seen as a multi-layered process. Student learning, likewise, is a complex extended process. The research has outlined a number of characteristics of effective professional learning that can be considered at various levels, such as schools, systems and other organisations, when providing professional learning experiences for teachers of religious education. One of the assumptions of professional learning is that increased teacher knowledge will improve teacher practice that will in turn translate into higher levels of student achievement (Supovitz, 2001). Achieving higher levels of expectations for all students requires fundamentally changing what students learn and how they learn it. Professional learning is a crucial component in these efforts if we want to ensure that teachers are able to make significant changes in practice that is required to help students meet the learning challenges of higher standards. Therefore, we need to rethink how and what students learn, as well as how and what their teachers learn through professional learning (Fickel, 2002).

There is increasing pressure to ensure that schools are learning communities (DuFour, 2004); places for students and teachers to learn. This new vision of professional learning

builds the collective capacity of a staff to achieve its goals through job-embedded learning. Learning together as part of their work practice flies in the face of traditional professional learning models (DuFour et al., 2005c). In these traditional models, professional learning was conducted through a program or series of formal scheduled events. It was disconnected from authentic problem solving and was unlikely to have much influence on teacher or student learning. To change this view, schools need to be structured in ways that provide educators with opportunities to learn as they collectively address the challenge embedded in the gap between high standards of learning for all students and actual student performance (DuFour et al., 2005c; Hawley & Valli, 1999).

Professional learning has long suffered because of its separation from other critical elements of the education system, with the result that new ideas and strategies are not implemented. Professional learning has the possibility to support changes in such areas as curriculum and assessment, and create the culture and capacity for continuous improvement (DuFour et al., 2005c; Loucks-Horsley et al., 1998; Tallerico, 2005). Virtually all reform and new curriculum initiatives are calling for changes to our education system that,

...will help students to develop rich understandings of important content. Think critically, construct and solve problems, synthesis information, invent, create express themselves proficiently and leave school prepared to be responsible citizens and life long learners (Borko & Putnam, 1995, p. 37).

Schooling is concerned with student achievement and teachers teach students to become more powerful learners. Therefore, the aim of professional learning needs to focus on student achievement (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Professional learning in religious education needs to be more than learning subject content and improving teaching skills to provide students with interesting and enjoyable lesson activities. Religious education is part of a much deeper religious experience, embedded within the culture of a faith community that needs to evoke a personal commitment and derive personal meaning for students (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).



Professional learning in religious education for teachers faces the challenges of meeting these student needs.

The research outlined professional learning as a multi layered process and identified several effective characteristics. The characteristics that were identified included understandings about change and the change process. It identified the need to ensure that participants were aware and involved in the process of choosing the content, structure, and the context of the program. Ultimately, the aim of professional learning should be to improve the practices of teachers within the classroom and the reason for improving teaching practices must be directly related to improving the learning and achievement for students.

## REFERENCES

- Allen, D., & Blythe, T. (2004). *The Facilitator's Book of Questions. Tools for looking Together at Student and Teacher Work*. New York: Teachers College press.
- Amalorpavadass, D. S. (1973). *Theology of catechesis*. Bangalore: National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre.
- Andrews, D., & Marian, L. (2007). Transforming practice from within, the power of the professional learning community. In L. Stoll & K. Seashore Louis (Eds.), *Professional Learning Communities. Divergence, Depth and Dilemmas* (pp. 132-147). New York: Open University Press.
- Archdiocese of Hobart. (2005). *Good News for Living*. [GNL]. Hobart: Catholic Education Office.
- Archdiocese of Melbourne. (1984). *Guidelines for religious education for primary students in the Archdiocese of Melbourne*. Melbourne: Catholic Education Office.
- Archdiocese of Melbourne. (1995). *Guidelines for religious education for primary students in the Archdiocese of Melbourne*. Melbourne: Catholic Education Office.
- Barcan, A. (1980). *A History of Australian Education*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Barth, R. S. (1991). Restructuring schools: Some questions for teachers and principals. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 73(2), 123-128.
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1967). *The Social Construction of Reality*. Retrieved March 22, 2009, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Social\\_of\\_Reality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Social_of_Reality)
- Bezzina, M. (1997). Does Groome's Shared Christian Praxis Provide a Sound Basis for Religious Education? *Word in Life*, 45(3), 16-24.
- Black, P. J., & William, D. (1998). Inside the black box: Raising standards through classroom assessment. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 86(1), 8-21.
- Blumer, H. (1986). *Symbolic Interactionism. Practice and Method*. Berkley: University of California Press.
- Blythe, T., Allen, D., & Powell, B. S. (2008). *Looking Together at Student Work*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Bogdan, R., & Taylor, S. (1975). *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A phenomenological approach to the social sciences*. New York: Wiley.

- Borko, H., & Putnam, R. (1995). Expanding a teacher's knowledge base: A cognitive psychological perspective professional development. In T. Guskey & M. Huberman (Eds.), *Professional development in education: New paradigms and practices*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Bowers, B. (1989). Grounded Theory. In B. Starter (Ed.), *Paths to knowledge: Innovative research methods in nursing* (pp. 33-59). National League of Nursing, New York.
- Brady, J. M. (2005). *Sisters of St. Joseph: The Tasmanian Experience. The Foundation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Tasmania 1887-1937*. Unpublished PhD, ACU, Melbourne.
- Braham, B. (1995). *Creating the learning community*. California: Crisp Publications.
- Brooks, J. G., & Brooks, M. G. (1993). *In search of understanding: The case for constructivist classrooms*. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).
- Bryk, A. S., Rollow, S. G., & Pinnell, G. S. (1996). Urban school development: Literacy as a lever for change. *Educational Policy*, 10(2), 172-201.
- Buchanan, M. (2003). Survey of current writing on trends in religious education. *Journal of Religious Education*, 51(4), 22-30.
- Buchanan, M. (2007). *Management of Curriculum Change: An analysis of religious education coordinators' perspectives on the management of a particular change in Catholic secondary schools in the archdiocese of Melbourne*. Unpublished PhD, ACU, Melbourne.
- Buchanan, M. (2008). The Whole Religious Education Curriculum. In K. Engebretson, M. d. Souza, R. Rymarz & M. T. Buchanan (Eds.), *Cornerstones of Catholic Secondary Religious Education. Principles and Practice of the New Evangelization*. Terrigal, NSW: David Barlow Publishing.
- Buchler, E. A., & Buller, T. (1998). Staff Development: Potential tool for teacher training. Retrieved June 30, 2003, from [www.ed.gov/pubs/PromPractice/chap6.html](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/PromPractice/chap6.html)
- Buchovecky, E. (2000). ATLAS - Learning From Student Work. *National School Reform Faculty*. Retrieved March 3, 2007, from [www.nsrffharmony.org](http://www.nsrffharmony.org)
- Burgess, R. (1982). The Unstructured Interview as a Conversation. In R. Burgess (Ed.), *Field Research: A Sourcebook and Field Manual*. London: Unwin.
- Cartwright, C. A., & Cartwright, G. P. (1974). *Developing Observational Skills*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

- Charmaz, K. (2000). Grounded theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods. In L. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 509-537). London: Sage.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory. A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Charon, J. (2001). *Symbolic Interactionism, An Introduction, An Interpretation, An Integration*. New Jersey: Prentice Hill.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. (1993). *Inside/outside: Teacher research and knowledge*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Cohen, D., & Hill, H. (1997). *Teaching and Learning Mathematics in California*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting.
- Congregation for Catholic Education. (1988). *The religious dimension of education in a Catholic school*. Homebush, NSW: St. Paul's Publications.
- Congregation for the Clergy. (1998). *General directory for catechesis*. Homebush, NSW: St. Paul's Publications.
- Corcoran, T. B. (1995). Transforming Professional Development for Teachers: A Guide for State Policymakers. Retrieved June 30, 2003, from [www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educatrs/profdevl/pd4ref.htm](http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educatrs/profdevl/pd4ref.htm)
- Cotton, K. (2003). *Principals and Student Achievement*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Crawford, M., & Rossiter, G. (1985). *Teaching religion in the secondary school: Theory and practice*. Strathfield: Christian Brothers Resource Group.
- Crawford, M., & Rossiter, G. (1987). What is the place for academically challenging RE in Catholic schools? *Catholic School Studies*, 60(1), 20-24.
- Crawford, M., & Rossiter, G. (1988). *Missionaries to a teenage culture: Religious education in a time of rapid change*. Sydney, Strathfield: Christian Brothers Province Resource Group.
- Crawford, M., & Rossiter, G. (2006). *Reasons for living: education and young people's search for meaning, identity and spirituality. A handbook*. Camberwell, Victoria: ACER Press.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The Foundations of Social Research. Meaning and perspective in the research process*. St. Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin Pty. Ltd.

- Danielson, C. (2002). *Enhancing Student Achievement. A framework for school improvement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). *The right to learn: A blueprint for creating schools that work*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Darling-Hammond, L., & McLaughlin, M. W. (1995). Policies That Support Professional development in an Era of Reform. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(8), 597-604.
- de Souza, M. (1999). *Students' and teachers' perceptions of Year 12 religious education programs in Catholic schools in Victoria: Implications for curriculum*. Unpublished PhD, Australian Catholic University, Ascot Vale.
- de Souza, M. (2001). Addressing the spiritual dimension in education: Teaching affectively to promote cognition. *Journal of Religious Education*, 49(3), 31-41.
- Denzin, N. (1992). *Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Studies. The politics of interpretation*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.). (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.). (2003). *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: Sage.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.). (2008). *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). London: Sage.
- Department of Education Tasmania. (2002). Essential Learnings. Retrieved March 7, 2004, from [www.education.tas.gov.au/ocll/publications/essentiallearnings.pdf](http://www.education.tas.gov.au/ocll/publications/essentiallearnings.pdf)
- Dey, I. (1999). *Grounding grounded theory: Guidelines for qualitative inquiry*. San Diego, California: Academic Press.
- Diocese of Parramatta. (1991). *Sharing our Story: Religious education curriculum*. Parramatta, NSW: Catholic Education Office.
- Drago-Severson, E. (2004a). *Becoming Adult Learners*. New York: Teacher's College Press.
- Drago-Severson, E. (2004b). *Helping Teachers Learn. Principal Leadership for Adult Growth and Development*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press.
- DuFour, R. (2004). What is a "Professional learning community"? *Educational Leadership*, 61(8), 6-11.

- DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & DuFour, R. (2005a). Closing the Knowing-Doing Gap. In R. DuFour, R. Eaker & R. DuFour (Eds.), *On Common Ground*. Bloomington, Indiana: Solution Tree.
- DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & DuFour, R. (2005b). Recurring themes of professional learning communities and the assumptions they challenge. In R. DuFour, R. Eaker & R. DuFour (Eds.), *On Common Ground: The Power of Professional Learning Communities* (pp. 7-29). Bloomington, Indiana: Solution tree.
- DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & DuFour, R. (Eds.). (2005c). *On common ground. The power of professional learning communities*. Bloomington, Indiana: Solution Tree.
- Engebretson, K. (1997). The Four Point Plan of the Melbourne Guidelines and Shared Christian Praxis: two distinct and different methodologies. *Word In Life*, 45(3), 25-30.
- Engebretson, K. (2002). Writing church-sponsored religious education textbooks. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 25(1), 33-45.
- Engebretson, K., & Rymarz, R. (2005). Putting textbooks to work: Empowering religious education teachers. *British Journal of Religious Education* 27(1), 53-63.
- English, G. (2002). The Professional Development of Australian Catholic Religious Educators over the fifty years since the Journal of Religious Education began. *Journal of Religious Education*, 50(2), 23-29.
- Erickson, L. (2001). *Stirring the Head, Heart, and Soul. redefining curriculum and instruction*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press, Inc.
- Erickson, L. (2002). *Concept-Based Curriculum and Instruction*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press, Inc.
- Fashola, O., & Slavin, R. (1998). School wide Reform Models: What Works? *Phi Delta Kappan*, 79, 370-379.
- Fickel, L. H. (2002). Quality professional development: Suggestions about process and content. *The Educational Forum*, 67(Fall), 47-54.
- Flanders, N. (1970). *Analyzing Teacher Behavior*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Fontana, A., & Frey, J., H. (2000). The Interview. From structured questions to negotiated text. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Fontana, A., & Frey, J., H. (2008). The Interview: From Neutral Stance to Political Involvement. In N. K. Denzin, Y. S. Lincoln & . (Eds.), *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc.

- Fowler, F. J. (1993). *Survey Research methods* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications.
- Fox, N. M. (2006). *An Acorn Grows among the Gums. The Presentations Sisters in Tasmania, 1866 -2006*. Tasmania: Presentation Sisters Property Association.
- Freire, P. (1972). *Cultural action for freedom*. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin.
- Freire, P. (1973). *Education for Critical Consciousness*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Fullan, M. (1991). *The new meaning of educational change*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Fullan, M. (1993). *Forces of change*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fullan, M. (2005a). *Leadership and sustainability: System thinkers in action*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Fullan, M. (2005b). Professional Learning Communities Writ Large. In R. DuFour, R. Eaker & R. DuFour (Eds.), *On common ground. The power of professional learning communities* (pp. 209-223). Bloomington: Solution Tree.
- Fullan, M., Hill, P., & Crevola, C. (2006). *Breakthrough*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press.
- Gardner, H. (1995). *The Unschooled Mind. How Children Think & How Schools Should teach*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gardner, H. (1999). *Intelligence reframed: Multiple intelligence for the 21st century*. New York: Basic Books.
- Glaser, B. G. (1992). *Basics of grounded theory analysis*. Mill Valley, C.A: Sociology Press.
- Glaser, B. G. (1998). *Doing grounded theory: Issues and discussions*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Glatthorn, A. A., & Jailall, J. (2000). Curriculum for the new millenium. In R. Brandt, S (Ed.), *Education in a new era*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

- Gluckmann, M. (1974). *Structuralist Analysis in Contemporary Social Thought. A comparison of the theories of Claude Levi-Strauss and Louis Althusser*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.
- Graham, J. (1997). Transformational Leadership in Religious Education. In R. Keane & D. Riley (Eds.), *Quality Catholic Schools: Challenges for Leadership as Catholic Education Approaches the Third Millennium* (pp. 27-37). Brisbane, Qld: Catholic Education.
- Groome, T. (1980). *Christian Religious Education: Sharing our story*. Melbourne: Dove Communications.
- Groome, T. (1991). *Sharing Faith: A comprehensive approach to religious education and pastoral ministry*. San Francisco: Harper Collins.
- Guskey, T. (1986). Staff development and the process of teacher change. *Educational Researcher*, 15(5), 5-12.
- Guskey, T. (1995). Results-oriented professional development: In search of an optimal mix of effective practices. Retrieved July 2, 2005, from [www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/rpl\\_esys/pdlitrev.htm#Research](http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/rpl_esys/pdlitrev.htm#Research)
- Guskey, T. (2000). *Evaluating professional development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Guskey, T. (2002). Does it make a difference? Evaluating professional development. *Educational Leadership*, 59(6), 41-51.
- Guskey, T. (2007). Using Assessments to Improve Teaching and Learning. In D. Reeves (Ed.), *Ahead of the curve: The power of assessment to transform teaching and learning*. Bloomington, Indiana: Solution Tree.
- Haberman, M. (2004). Can star teachers create learning communities? *Educational Leadership*, 61(8), 52-56.
- Habermas, J. (1972). *Knowledge and the Human Interest*. London: Heinemann.
- Habermas, J. (1979). *Communication and the Evolution of Society*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Hack, J. (2004). Personal Meaning: An emerging pedagogical principle in religious education. *Journal of Religious Education*, 52(4), 54-62.
- Hackett, C. (1995). Religious education moves on. Review of Australian Research in religious education in Catholic Secondary Schools 1984-1994. *Word in Life*, 43(4), 13-19.



- Haig, B. D. (2003). Grounded theory as scientific method. Retrieved May 17, 2004, from [http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-yearbook/95\\_docs/haig.html](http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-yearbook/95_docs/haig.html)
- Hargreaves, A. (1994). *Changing teachers, changing times: Teacher's work and culture in the postmodern age*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hargreaves, A. (1995). Development and Desire: A Postmodern Perspective. In T. R. Guskey & M. Huberman (Eds.), *Professional Development in Education: New Paradigms and Practices*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Hargreaves, A. (2007). Sustainable professional learning communities. In L. Stoll & K. Seashore Louis (Eds.), *Professional Learning Communities. Divergence, Depth and Dilemmas* (pp. 181-195). New York: Open University Press.
- Hawley, W. D., & Valli, L. (1999). The Essentials of Effective Professional Development. In L. Darling-Hammond & G. Sykes (Eds.), *Teaching as the Learning Profession: Handbook of Policy and Practice* (pp. 127-150). San-Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Healy, H., Hyde, B., & Rymarz, R. (2004). *Making our way through primary RE*. Tuggerah, NSW: Social Science Press.
- Heylighen, F. (1993). Epistemology, introduction. Retrieved March 22, 2009, from <http://pespmcl.vub.ac.be/EPISTEMI.Html>
- Heylighen, F. (1997). Epistemological Constructivism. Retrieved March 22, 2009, from <http://pespmcl.vub.ac.be/CONSTRUC.html>
- Hoban, G. (1997). Opportunities for knowledge building in professional development models. In R. King, D. Hill & J. Retallick (Eds.), *Exploring Professional Development in Education*. Wentworth Falls, NSW: Social Science Press.
- Hodges, H. L. B. (1996). Using Research to Inform Practice in Urban School: Ten Key Strategies for Success. *Educational Policy*, 10(2), 223-252.
- Holohan, G. J. (1999). *Australian religious education: Facing the challenges*. Canberra: National Catholic Education Commission.
- Hook, C. (1981). *Studying Classrooms*. Deakin, Victoria: Deakin University.
- Huberman, M. (1993). *The Lives of Teachers*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Huberman, M. (1995a). Networks That Alter Teaching: Conceptualizations, Exchanges, and Experiments. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 1, 193-211.
- Huberman, M. (1995b). Professional Careers and Professional Development: Some Intersections. In T. R. Guskey & M. Huberman (Eds.), *Professional Development in*

- Education: New Paradigms and Practices*. New York, Columbia University: Teachers College Press.
- Hyde, B., & Rymarz, R. (2009). *Religious Education in Catholic Primary Schools. contemporary Issues and perspectives for RE Teachers*. Terrigal, NSW: David Barlow Publishing.
- Johnson, D., & Johnson, R. (1989). *Cooperation and competition: Theory and research*. Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company.
- Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (1995). *Student Achievement Through Staff Development: Fundamentals of School Renewal* (2nd ed.). White Plains, N.Y: Longman.
- Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (2002). *Student Achievement through staff development* (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervisi0on and Curriculum development.
- Kagan, S. (1994). *Cooperative learning*. San Juan, Capistrano: Kagan Cooperative Learning.
- Kemmis, S. (1981). *The Action Research Planner*. Deakin, Geelong, Australia Deakin University.
- Kiefer Hipp, K., & Bumpers Huffman, J. (2007). Using assessment tools as frames for dialogue to create and sustain professional learning communities. In L. Stoll & K. Seashore Louis (Eds.), *Professional Learning Communities. Divergence, Depth and Dilemmas* (pp. 119 - 131). New York: Open University Press.
- Killion, J. (2002). *Assessing impact: Evaluating staff development*. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.
- King, R., Hill, D., & Retallick, J. (Eds.). (1997). *Exploring professional development in education*. NSW: Social Science Press.
- King, S. (1999). Leadership in the 21st Century: Using feedback to maintain focus and direction. In D. D. Marsh (Ed.), *ASCD Year Book 1999: Preparing our schools for the 21st century*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Klein, P. D. (2005). Epistemology. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved March 22, 2009, from <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/P059>
- Knowles, M., Holton, E., & Swanson, R. (1998). *The adult learner*. Newton, M.A: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Koszarycz. (1993). *Story Makers*. Melbourne, Australia: Collins Dove.
- Kruse, S., & Seashore Louis, K. (2007). Developing collective understanding over time: reflections on building professional community. In L. Stoll & K. Seashore Louis

- (Eds.), *Professional Learning Communities. Divergence, Depth and Dilemmas* (pp. 106-118). New York: Open University Press.
- Lambert, L. (1998). *Building leadership capacity*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Liddy, S., & Welbourne, L. (1999). *Strategies for teaching Religious Education*. Wentworth Falls: Social Science Press.
- Lieberman, A. (1995). *The Work of Restructuring Schools: Building from the Ground Up*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Lieberman, A. (2007). Professional learning communities: a reflection. In L. Stoll & K. Seashore Louis (Eds.), *Professional Learning Communities. Divergence, Depth and Dilemmas* (pp. 199- 203). New York: Open University Press.
- Lieberman, A., & Miller, L. (2000). Teaching and teacher development: A new synthesis for a new century. In R. Brandt, S (Ed.), *Education in a new era*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. G. (2000). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions and emerging confluences. In L. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 163-188). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Little, J. W. (1982). Norms of collegiality and experimentation: Workplace conditions of school success. *American Education Research Journal*, 19(3), 325.
- Little, J. W., Gearhart, M., Curry, M., & Kafka, J. (2003). Looking at student work for teacher learning, teacher community, and school reform. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 85(3), 185-192.
- Little, J. W., & Horn, I. S. (2007). 'Normalizing' problems of practice: Converting routine conversation into a resource for learning in professional communities. In L. Stoll & K. Seashore Louis (Eds.), *Professional Learning Communities. Divergence, Depth and Dilemmas* (pp. 79-92). New York: Open University Press.
- Lortie, D. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study*. Chicago: Univerisy of Chicago Press.
- Loucks-Horsley, S. (1998). Ideas that work: Effective Professional Development for Teachers of Mathematics. Retrieved April 3, 2003, from [www.ENC.home/professional\\_development](http://www.ENC.home/professional_development)
- Loucks-Horsley, S., Hewson, P., Love, N., Stiles, K., Dyasi, H., Friel, S., et al. (1998). *Designing Professional Development for Teachers of Science and Mathematics*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

- Lovat, T. (1989). *What is this thing called Religious Education? Summary, Critique and a new Proposal*. Wentworth Falls: Social Science Press.
- Lovat, T. (2002). *What is this thing called R.E. a decade on?* Wentworth Falls: Social Science Press.
- MacDonald, M. (Ed.). (1993). *Growing Together in Faith*. Melbourne: Collins Dove.
- Malone, P. (1997). Classroom use of curriculum resources. *Word in Life*, 45(4), 14-19.
- Malone, P., & Ryan, M. (1996). *Review of Sharing our Story*. Parramatta: Parramatta Diocesan Catholic Education Office.
- Marzano, R. J. (2000). *Transforming classroom grading*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).
- Marzano, R. J. (2003a). *What Works in Schools. Translating Research into Action*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Marzano, R. J. (2003b). *What works in schools. Translating research into action*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).
- Marzano, R. J. (2007). Designing a Comprehensive Approach to Classroom Assessment. In D. Reeves (Ed.), *Ahead of the curve: The power of assessment to transform teaching and learning*. Bloomington, Indiana: Solution Tree.
- McCarthy, S., & Peterson, P. (1993). Creating Classrooms Within the Context of a Restructured Professional Development School. In M. Cohen, McLaughlin & J. Talbert (Eds.), *Teaching for Understanding. Challenges for Policy and Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- McCormack, A. J. (1988). *Participation in system decision-making in the re-structuring of Catholic Secondary Schools in Launceston, 1975-1984*. Unpublished PhD, University of Tasmania, Hobart.
- McGaw, B., Piper, K., Banks, D., & Evans, B. (1992). *Making schools more effective*. Hawthorn, Victoria: ACER.
- Meiers, M., & Ingvarson, L. (2003). *Investigating the links between teacher professional development and student learning outcomes*: Australian Council of Educational Research. Document Number)
- Mitchell, C., & Sackney, L. (2000). *Profound Improvement: Building Capacity for a Learning Community*. Lisse: Swets and Zeitlinger.

- Moore Johnson, S., & Kardos, S. M. (2002). Keeping Teachers in Mind. *Educational Leadership*, 59(6), 12-17.
- Moran, G. (1991). Understanding religion and being religious. *Professional Approaches for Christian Educators*, 21, 249-252.
- Nelson, L. D. (1998). Herbert Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism. Retrieved March 22, 2009, from [http://www.colorado.edu/Communication/meta-discourses/Papers/App\\_Papers/Nelson...](http://www.colorado.edu/Communication/meta-discourses/Papers/App_Papers/Nelson...)
- Newmann, F., King, M. B., & Youngs, P. (2000). *Professional Development to Build Organizational Capacity in Low Achieving Schools: Promising Strategies and Future Challenges*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin - Madison, Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools.
- O'Donoghue, T., & Burley, S. (2008). God's antipodean teaching force: An historical exposition on Catholic teaching religious in Australia. *Teaching and Teacher Education: An International Journal of Research & Studies*, 24(1), 180-189.
- O'Farrell, P. J. (1969). *The Catholic Church in Australia, A short history: 1788 - 1967*. London: Geoffrey, Chapman.
- O'Farrell, P. J. (1985). *The Catholic Church and Community: an Australian History*. Kensington, Sydney: NSW University Press.
- Palmer, P. J. (1998). *The Courage to Teach*. New York: Jossey-Bass.
- Rand, A. (1982). Objectivism. Retrieved March 22, 2009, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Objectivism\\_\(Ayn\\_Rand\)#Epistemology:\\_reason](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Objectivism_(Ayn_Rand)#Epistemology:_reason)
- Reeves, D. (2005). Putting it all together: standards, assessment, and accountability in successful professional learning communities. In R. DuFour, R. Eaker & R. DuFour (Eds.), *On Common ground: The power of professional learning communities* (pp. 45-63). Bloomington, Indiana: Solution Tree.
- Rossiter, G. (1981). The gap between aims and practice in religious education. *Word in Life*, 29(1), 24.
- Rossiter, G. (1985). The place of faith in classroom religious education. *Catholic School Studies*, 59(2), 49-55.
- Rossiter, G. (1986). The place of faith in classroom religious education. *Catholic School Studies*, 59(2), 49-55.
- Rossiter, G. (1987). The place of knowledge and faith in religious education since the Second Vatican Council. *Word in Life*, 35(1), 6-9.

- Rossiter, G. (1988). Perspectives on change in Catholic religious education since the second Vatican council. *Religious Education*, 83(2), 264-276.
- Rossiter, G. (1999). Historical perspective on the development of Catholic education in Australia: Some Implications for the future. *Journal of Religious Education*, 47(1).
- Rummery, G. (1975). *Catechesis and Religious Education in a Pluralist Society*. Sydney: E.J. Dwyer.
- Rummery, G. (1977). The Development of the Concept of Religious Education in Catholic Schools 1872-1972. *Journal of Religious History*, 9(3).
- Ryan, M. (1990). *The formative years in the development of Catholic schools in Victoria, 1872-1885*. Unpublished Ph.D, Boston, USA.
- Ryan, M. (1997a). *Foundations of religious education in Catholic schools: An Australian perspective*. Wentworth Falls, NSW: Social Science Press.
- Ryan, M. (1997b). *Respectable Citizens and Better Catholics. Maintaining Catholic Schools in Victoria 1872 - 1885*. Wentworth Falls, NSW: Social Science Press.
- Ryan, M. (1998). An evaluation of outcomes-based approaches of religious education curriculum guidelines. *Word in Life: Journal of Religious Education*, 46(1), 14 -19.
- Ryan, M. (1999). The classroom religion program in Catholic schools: Three rival conceptions of curriculum. *Journal of Religious Education*, 47(3), 19 - 26.
- Ryan, M. (2007). *A Common Search: The history and forms of religious education in Catholic schools*. Hamilton. Queensland: Lumino Press.
- Ryan, M., & Malone, P. (1996). *Exploring the Religion Classroom: A guidebook for Catholic schools*. Wentworth Falls: Social Science Press.
- Rymarz, R. (1997). *What should Teachers of Religious Education Know? An Examination of Teacher Knowledge and the Requirements of the Guidelines for Religious Education of Students in the Archdiocese of Melbourne*. Unpublished EdD, Monash, Melbourne.
- Rymarz, R. (1999). Knowledge and the Religious Education Teacher: A framework for understanding the skilled religious education teacher. *Journal of Religious Education*, 47(4), 48-51.
- Rymarz, R. (2007). Communitarian and Commitment Models of Religious Identity. *Journal of Religious Education*, 55(5), 54-59.
- Sagor, R. (2000). *Guiding School Improvement with Action Research*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

- Seidel, S. (1998a). Learning from looking. In N. Lyons (Ed.), *With portfolio in hand: Validating the new teacher professionalism* (pp. 69-89). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Seidel, S. (1998b). Wondering to be done: The collaborative assessment conference. In D. Allen (Ed.), *Assessing student learning: From grading to understanding* (pp. 21-39). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Senge, P. (2000). *Schools that learn*. New York: Doubleday.
- Sergiovanni, T. (2000). Changing change: Toward a design and art. *Journal of Educational Change*, 1,(1), 57-75.
- Shanker, A. (1993). Ninety-two Hours. *The developer*, 3(September), 3.
- Smylie, M. A. (1989). Teachers' views of the effectiveness of sources of learning to teach. *Elementary School Journal*, 89(5), 543-558.
- Southerwood, W. T. (1983). *Guilford Young A Great Endeavour: Archbishop Sir Guilford Young's Work for Education in Australia*. George town, Tasmania: Stella Maris Books.
- Southerwood, W. T. (1989). *The Wisdom of Guilford Young*. George Town, Tasmania: Stella Maris Books.
- Sparks, D. (1994). A paradigm shift in staff development. *Journal of staff development*, 15(4), 26-29.
- Sparks, D., & Loucks-Horsley, S. (1989). Five models of staff development. *Journal of staff development*, 10(4).
- Spillane, J. (1995). *Constructing an Ambitious Pedagogy in Fifth Grade: The Mathematics and Literacy Divide in Instructional Reform*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association.
- Stoll, L., Fink, D., & Earl, L. (2003). *It's About Learning (and it's about time) What's in it for schools?* London: Routledge Falmer.
- Stoll, L., & Seashore Louis, K. (Eds.). (2007). *Professional learning communities. Divergence, depth, dilemmas*. Berkshire, England: Open University Press.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (Eds.). (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). Grounded theory methodology: An overview. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, London: Sage.

- Supovitz, J. (2001). Translating teaching practice into improved student achievement. In S. Fuhrman (Ed.), *From the capitol to the classroom. Standards-based reforms in the states. The one hundredth yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part Two* (pp. 81-98). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sykes, G. (1999). Teacher and Student Learning. In L. Darling-Hammond & G. Sykes (Eds.), *Teaching as the Learning Profession. Handbook of Policy and Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Boss.
- Tallerico, M. (2005). *Supporting and sustaining teachers' process development: A principal's guide*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press.
- The Holy See. (1994). *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Strathfield, NSW: St. Paul's Publication.
- Toole, J. C., & Louis, K. S. (2002). The role of professional communities in international education. In K. Leithwood & P. Hallinger (Eds.), *Second International Handbook of Educational Leadership and Administration*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Townsend, T. (2005). *New Waves of Leadership: From Accountability games to Leading the Learning*. Paper presented at the ACEL National Travelling Scholar Program, Hobart.
- Welbourne, A. L. (1995). *Critical religious educators: The role of graduate students in their personal and professional development*. Unpublished PhD University of New England, Armidale.
- Welbourne, L. (1997). Editorials from Word in life 1997: Reconceptualising religious education. *Word in Life* Retrieved March 26, 2003, from [www.acu.edu.au/ren/wilfea03.htm](http://www.acu.edu.au/ren/wilfea03.htm)
- Welbourne, L. (2004). Pedagogy and Religious Literacy. *Journal of Religious Education*, 52(3), 1.
- White, D. (2004). *Pedagogy - The Missing Link In Religious Education*. Unpublished Ed.D, ACU, Sydney.
- White, D., & O'Brien, K. (1999). *The collaborative decision making 'tool kit'*. (Vol. 1). Marayong, NSW: K.D. Publications.
- Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (1998). *Understanding by design*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- William, D. (2007). Content then Process: Teacher Learning Communities in the Service of Formative Assessment. In D. Reeves (Ed.), *Ahead of the curve: The power of assessment to transform teaching and learning*. Bloomington, Indiana: Solution Tree.



## APPENDIX 1.

## CONSENT FROM DIRECTOR



CATHOLIC  
education office  
HOBART

2 October 2006

Sandra Harvey  
Principal  
Stella Maris Primary School  
PO Box 137  
Burnie Tas 7320

Dear Sandra

I am writing in response to your letter of 21 September 2006 seeking permission to collect information at Stella Maris Primary School in connection with your Ed.D. studies on "*developing a model of professional development for teachers of religious education*".

I have read the information provided by you and, subsequently, I happy to provide in principle approval. Please note, however, that as you are Principal of Stella Maris School it will be up to the Deputy Principal at Stella Maris Primary School to determine whether they wish to participate.

Please accept my best wishes for your studies and do not hesitate to contact this office if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely

Dr Dan White  
**Director**

dw mp

The D'Arcy Centre  
5 Emmett Place New Town TAS 7008  
PO Box 102 North Hobart 7002  
Tel: 03 6210 8888  
Fax: 03 6210 8844  
office@ceo.hobart.catholic.edu.au  
www.ceo.hobart.catholic.edu.au  
ABN: 55 210 770 582  
Archdiocese of Hobart

Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne

## APPENDIX 2.

Ethics Approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee



### Human Research Ethics Committee

#### Committee Approval Form

**Principal Investigator/Supervisor:** A/Prof Kath Engebretson Melbourne Campus  
**Co-Investigators:** Melbourne Campus  
**Student Researcher:** Sandra Harvey Melbourne Campus

**Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:**  
Developing a professional learning community of religious educators through professional development activities  
**for the period:** 1<sup>st</sup> September 2007 - 31<sup>st</sup> December 2007  
**Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number:** V200607 2

The following standard conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (1999) apply:

- (i) that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
  - security of records
  - compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
  - compliance with special conditions, and
- (ii) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:
  - proposed changes to the protocol
  - unforeseen circumstances or events
  - adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than low risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of negligible risk and low risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a *Final Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

Signed: ..... Date: 3.3.2007  
(Research Services Officer, Melbourne Campus)

## APPENDIX 3A

### Teacher Survey

Over the next twelve months we will be implementing the new Curriculum Guidelines as determined by the Archdiocese of Hobart. In this survey you will be asked to think about your dominant feelings towards the change that has been implemented by circling the numbers for each of the questions below. If you have not felt either feeling much or have felt them pretty much equally, circle the '0'. If you have felt one side of the continuum, circle the number that indicates the extent of your feeling. For instance a '1' (or '-1') would indicate a slight tendency to feel this way, whereas a '4' or ('-4') would indicate the you felt this way most of the time.

1. Has it been clear what the purpose and direction of change has been or have you been confused about where it was going?

Purpose    4    3    2    1    0    -1   -2    -3   -4    Confusion

2. Do you have the knowledge needed to make the change work in your classroom or do you feel anxious?

Knowledge    4    3    2    1    0    -1   -2    -3   -4    Anxiety

3. Have you supported the change and change processes or have you resisted them?

Support    4    3    2    1    0    -1   -2    -3   -4    Resistance

4. Has there been adequate time and resources allocated to the change or have you felt periods of stress?

Resources    4    3    2    1    0    -1   -2    -3   -4    Stress

5. Has there been progress over the period or does there seem to be hesitation?

Progress    4    3    2    1    0    -1   -2    -3   -4    Hesitation

6. Have you participated in decisions related to the change or have you felt hat you were excluded from the process?

Participation    4    3    2    1    0    -1   -2    -3   -4    Exclusion

7. Have your feelings been considered when the change was taking place or have you felt angry about the way it has impacted on you?

Consideration    4    3    2    1    0    -1   -2    -3   -4    Anger

8. Have you had fun over the course of the change or has it just been boring?

Humour    4    3    2    1    0    -1   -2    -3   -4    Boredom

9. Has the change been exciting for you or have you been agitated by it?

Excitement    4    3    2    1    0    -1   -2    -3   -4    Agitation

10. Have you been passionate about the change or apathetic towards it?

Passion    4    3    2    1    0    -1   -2    -3   -4    Apathy

11. Are you trusted by the people managing the change or do you feel guilty if you don't do everything their way?

Trust    4    3    2    1    0    -1   -2    -3   -4    Guilt

12. Have the people managing the change been compassionate or has the change process been driven by fear?

Compassion    4    3    2    1    0    -1   -2    -3   -4    Fear

13. Has everyone been treated equally during the change or do some people seem to get most the benefits?

Equity    4    3    2    1    0    -1   -2    -3   -4    Patronage

14. Have you gained a sense of satisfaction from the change or have you felt frustrated?

Satisfaction    4    3    2    1    0    -1   -2    -3   -4    Frustration

15. If there are any other feelings that you have had throughout the change process could you please list them and indicate how important they are (in either a negative or positive sense). You do not need to indicate the other end of the continuum.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1    2    3    4

\_\_\_\_\_ 1    2    3    4

\_\_\_\_\_ 1    2    3    4

### **Part 2: Dominant Feelings:**

Indicate, in order of importance which three of these questions has had the most important impact on you over the course of the change. For each of the dominant feelings indicate what factors contributed to you feeling that way.

Feeling 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Most significant factor influencing the feeling: \_\_\_\_\_

Feeling 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Most significant factor influencing the feeling: \_\_\_\_\_

Feeling 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Most significant factor influencing the feeling: \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for completing this questionnaire.**

*(Adapted and used with permission from Tony Townsend)*

## APPENDIX 3B

### Teacher Survey – Moderation and Collaborative Assessment in RE

In this survey you will be asked to think about your dominant feelings towards the Moderation and the Collaborative Assessment process. Please circle the numbers for each of the questions below. If you have not felt either feeling much or have felt them pretty much equally, circle the '0'. If you have felt one side of the continuum, circle the number that indicates the extent of your feeling. For instance a '1' (or '-1') would indicate a slight tendency to feel this way, whereas a '4' or ('-4') would indicate the you felt this way most of the time.

1. Has it been clear what the purpose of the moderation process was or have you been confused about where it was going?

Purpose    4    3    2    1    0    -1    -2    -3    -4    Confusion

2. Do you have the knowledge needed to make the change work in your classroom or do you feel anxious?

Knowledge    4    3    2    1    0    -1    -2    -3    -4    Anxiety

3. Have you supported the change and change processes or have you resisted them?

Support    4    3    2    1    0    -1    -2    -3    -4    Resistance

4. Has there been adequate time and resources allocated to the change or have you felt periods of stress?

Resources    4    3    2    1    0    -1    -2    -3    -4    Stress

5. Has there been progress over the period or does there seem to be hesitation?

Progress    4    3    2    1    0    -1    -2    -3    -4    Hesitation

6. Have you participated in decisions related to the change or have you felt that you were excluded from the process?

Participation    4    3    2    1    0    -1    -2    -3    -4    Exclusion

7. Have your feelings been considered when the change was taking place or have you felt angry about the way it has impacted on you?

Consideration    4    3    2    1    0    -1    -2    -3    -4    Anger

8. Have you had fun over the course of the change or has it just been boring?

Humour    4    3    2    1    0    -1    -2    -3    -4    Boredom

9. Has the change been exciting for you or have you been agitated by it?

Excitement    4    3    2    1    0    -1    -2    -3    -4    Agitation

10. Have you been passionate about the change or apathetic towards it?

Passion 4 3 2 1 0 -1 -2 -3 -4 Apathy

11. Are you trusted by the people managing the change or do you feel guilty if you don't do everything their way?

Trust 4 3 2 1 0 -1 -2 -3 -4 Guilt

12. Have the people managing the change been compassionate or has the change process been driven by fear?

Compassion 4 3 2 1 0 -1 -2 -3 -4 Fear

13. Has everyone been treated equally during the change or do some people seem to get most the benefits?

Equity 4 3 2 1 0 -1 -2 -3 -4 Patronage

14. Have you gained a sense of satisfaction from the change or have you felt frustrated?

Satisfaction 4 3 2 1 0 -1 -2 -3 -4 Frustration

15. If there are any other feelings that you have had throughout the change process could you please list them and indicate how important they are (in either a negative or positive sense). You do not need to indicate the other end of the continuum.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1 2 3 4

\_\_\_\_\_ 1 2 3 4

\_\_\_\_\_ 1 2 3 4

## Part 2: Dominant Feelings:

Indicate, in order of importance which three of these questions has had the most important impact on you over the course of the change. For each of the dominant feelings indicate what factors contributed to you feeling that way.

Feeling 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Most significant factor influencing the feeling: \_\_\_\_\_

Feeling 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Most significant factor influencing the feeling: \_\_\_\_\_

Feeling 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Most significant factor influencing the feeling: \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for completing this questionnaire.**

*(Adapted and used with permission from Tony Townsend )*

**APPENDIX 4****Semi - Structured Interviews  
Focus Questions.**

1. What elements of the professional learning process did you enjoy?
2. What elements of the professional process do you believe helped you :
  - a. With your planning of teaching activities?
  - b. With your understanding of the topic/concept that you were teaching?
3. What difficulties did you experience (if any)?
4. What do you believe this tells you about your own learning?
5. What do you believe are the most effective ways of learning for you?
6. Do you think any of the elements of the professional learning model helped you personally – in your own faith journey?
7. Do you believe that learning outcomes have changed for students in your own classroom? If so how/why?

## APPENDIX 5A

Flanders' Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC) taken from Hook, 19981, p. 91.

### Teacher talk

#### Response

1. Accepts feelings. Accepts and clarifies an attitude or the feeling tone of a pupil in a non-threatening manner. Feelings may be positive or negative. Predicting and recalling feelings are included.
2. Praises or encourages. Praises or encourages pupil action or behaviour. Jokes that release tension, but not at the expense of another individual, nodding head, or saying 'Um hm?' or 'go on' are included.
3. Accepts or uses ideas of pupils. Clarifying, building or developing ideas suggested by a pupil. Teacher extensions of pupil ideas are included but as the teacher brings more of his/her ideas into play shift to category five.
4. Asks questions. Asking a question about content or procedure, based on teacher ideas, with the intent that a pupil will answer.

#### Initiation

5. Lecturing. Giving facts or opinions about content or procedure, expressing his/her own ideas giving explanations or citing an authority other than a pupil.
6. Giving directions. Directions, commands or orders to which a pupil is expected to comply.
7. Criticising or justifying authority. Statements intended to change pupil behaviour from non-acceptable to acceptable pattern; bawling someone out, stating why the teacher is doing what he is doing; extreme self-reference.

### Pupil talk

#### Response

8. Pupil talk – response. Talk by pupils in response to teacher. Teacher initiates the contact or solicits pupil statement or structures the situation. Freedom to express own ideas is limited.

#### Initiation

9. Pupil talk – initiation. Talk by pupils which they initiate. Expressing own ideas; initiating a new topic; freedom to develop opinions and a line of thought, like asking thoughtful questions; going beyond the existing structure.

### Silence

10. Silence or confusion. Pauses, short periods of silence and periods of confusion in which communication cannot be understood by the observer.



**APPENDIX 5B**

( FIAC Recording sheet)

**CLASSROOM OBSERVATION**

DATE\_\_\_\_\_

ROOM NUMBER\_\_\_\_\_

		TIME						
		5min.	10min	20min	25min.	30min	35min	40min.
TEACHER TALK (Indirect)	Accepts feelings							
	Praises or encourages							
	Accepts or uses students ideas							
	Asks questions							
TEACHER TALK (Direct)	Lectures							
	Gives directions							
	Criticises or justifies authority							
STUDENT TALK	Response							
	Initiation							
SILENCE	Confusion or uncodeable							



## APPENDIX 6

Australian Catholic University Limited  
 ABN 15 050 192 660  
 Melbourne Campus (St Patrick's)  
 115 Victoria Parade Fitzroy VIC 3065  
 Locked Bag 4115 Fitzroy MDC VIC 3065  
 Telephone 613 9953 3000  
 Facsimile 613 9953 3005  
 www.acu.edu.au

### CONSENT FORM Copy for Participant

**PROJECT TITLE:                    DEVELOPING A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY  
 OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS THROUGH PROFESSIONAL  
 LEARNING ACTIVITIES.**

SUPERVISORS                    DR. RICHARD RYMARZ / DR. KATH ENGBRETSON  
 STUDENT RESEARCHER                    ALEXANDRA HARVEY

I ..... (*the participant*) have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study, realising that I can withdraw at any time. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: .....

(block letters)

SIGNATURE .....

DATE .....

SIGNATURE OF SUPERVISOR.....

DATE:.....

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER.....

DATE.....

