

2009

Teacher learning in a Tibetan school in exile: A community of practice perspective

Pema Yangchen
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TEACHER LEARNING IN A TIBETAN SCHOOL IN EXILE:
A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE PERSPECTIVE

A Dissertation

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirement for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Approved:

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July 2009

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Ama Jetsun Pema La, the younger sister of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet, for her unwavering dedication and commitment to the education of Tibetan children in exile. I salute you for your courage, determination, and your selfless devotion to education of the Tibetan children. Thank you for helping me not only understand but value what “Others Before Self” truly means.

This is also dedicated to the spirits of my father, Mr. Sonam Dhargyal and my mother, Mrs. Yangdol. Losing both of you at a very early age taught me and my sister to face life with courage and determination and lead a meaningful life. I also dedicate this to you, my dear uncle, Mr. Mingur who took care of me and my sister and who taught us to work hard in life. I dedicate this to you, too, my dear sister, Yeshi Wangmo. Thank you for encouraging and believing in me. Thank you for being there for me!

Finally, I dedicate this to a couple who has a heart of gold, Richard and Judy Nall. Thank you for not only supporting me emotionally but for your very generous financial support during all the years of my graduate studies at the University of Northern Iowa. I want to pay my heartfelt gratitude to you both particularly, for funding my research trip to India.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the encouragement and support of many individuals. Foremost, I pay my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Linda May Fitzgerald who has been my academic advisor and dissertation committee chair. I will remain ever indebted to you for your guidance, encouragement, support and wisdom. I salute you for your dedication and commitment to education and for providing an exemplary model of scholarship. Thank you for understanding and listening to my stories and sharing all the ups and downs of my journey. Your generous editing and good heart has shaped my writing and helped make this dissertation into a complete and whole piece. You are the best advisor I have even known.

I am also deeply indebted to my committee members, Dr. Jeannie L. Steele, Dr. William P. Callahan, Dr. Robert M. Boody, and Dr. Ardith J. Meier. I am thankful to all of them and the chair for serving on my committee and for their time, energy and patience. I am extremely thankful for their valuable feedback, comments, and encouragement which made the writing of this dissertation an exhilarating intellectual adventure for me. I thank them for supporting me and challenging me which enlarged my experiences not only as a student but also as a future educator and researcher. I also thank Dr. David Landis for his advice, suggestions and questions during the initial stages of proposal writing.

Moreover, I would not have come this far without the financial support from the Graduate College and some very kind and generous individuals. I want to specially thank

Richard and Judy Nall for their generosity and for believing in my strengths. Thank you for supporting and loving me like your own daughter.

I thank my family and friends for their encouragement and support. Foremost, I want to thank my sister for believing in my dream and standing by me. I am thankful to my uncle and his family in Bhutan for being there for me. My special thanks go to my uncle, Geshe Thupten Dorjee, Ama Barbara, my dear friend Samten Chodon and her Amala for all their encouragement, support, and for being proud of me. Samten La, I am profoundly grateful to your friendship. I am also extremely thankful to Maya Hoogveld, for supporting my schooling when I was in the Tibetan Children's Village School in Dharamsala, India. Thank you for keeping in touch with me all these years. I want to thank my TESOL sisters and all my friends in India and the States who have encouraged me along the way. My special thanks go to Julie, Carol, Jackie, and Terry for their "chumship."

Finally, I would like to acknowledge and thank the ten devoted teachers for their willingness to participate in my research and who shared their professional experiences with me. I am extremely thankful to them for their time, energy, and candid responses to my questions and concerns. I am grateful to the principal for graciously granting me permission to conduct my research in the school. I thank him and his family for taking care of me and for all their encouragement and support.

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PREFACE

Lessons from Learning about Learning

My teaching journey in a Tibetan school for exiles in India began during the summer of 1993 as a fresh college graduate with no background in teacher education. I modeled my teaching around the teachers I had witnessed as a student. I thought teaching was neither particularly complicated nor demanding and that I could easily teach English with my bachelor's degree in English literature. It did not take me long to realize that I underestimated the teaching profession. Many people believe that anyone can teach as long as one can control the class. Such narrow-minded notions of teaching still exist in our societies, particularly in slowly globalizing countries.

The traditions of both India and Tibet treat teachers as agents of personal transformation. The teacher is seen as an “exemplary, inspiring and essential value-imparting” (Batra, 2005, p. 4347) individual. However, with the centralized education system in the Tibetan schools under the Indian education system, which was influenced by a colonial regime, the teacher's role has been reduced to a passive agent of the educational system. The teacher is the main source of knowledge and one's learning comprises what one learns from the teacher. Memorizing and recalling what the teacher has taught are the common learning practices. The students do not question the authority of the teacher and are satisfied with what the teacher teaches. The teacher is the possessor and dispenser of knowledge, which makes him/her the dominant figure in the classroom. The teacher possesses the power to decide what works or what does not for the students. Teachers are responsible for students' learning. Students are passive learners simply

absorbing at the receiving end. Education has been more teacher-driven than learner-driven. In my experience, both teachers and students seem to have been conditioned to these teaching and learning experiences respectively.

When I looked back at my eight years as an English language teacher, I realized that my professional life was synonymous with isolation. I taught the assigned classes, strictly following the textbooks and testing my students on the contents of the textbooks. I considered myself an independent teacher. I neither discussed the challenges I faced in my everyday teaching nor had the time to seriously reflect and critically analyze my teaching practices so that I could improve my practices. Due to limited funding resources, our school could not make provisions to support teacher learning. Teacher development efforts were rare. There was neither the time nor motivation on the part of the teachers to pursue professional growth. Teachers were already overloaded with their teaching and non-teaching responsibilities. Teachers had become accustomed to professional isolation without significant involvement with their colleagues. Therefore, teacher collaboration, mutual support and learning to improve both teaching and learning, was rare in the Tibetan schools.

Once a fellow teacher commenting on her fifth grade students said jokingly, “You know, in a few years my students will be in 6th and 7th grades and they would find what they are learning now very easy. They will pretend to be more knowledgeable than me and I’ll still be a fifth grade teacher.” I remember pondering over the comment and saying something nice instead of something substantive. She made a very important comment but we never discussed what we could do about it. Today, when I reflect on that

comment, it fills me with concern for my fellow teachers. This comment reflects a deeper and more serious state of the teachers, indicating to me the lack of opportunities for teacher growth and learning.

Investigating my learning history, I find that my experiences in India and at an American university have shaped and influenced what I value as a language teacher. During this time period, I had the opportunity to participate in multiple communities as a novice teacher, as a student teacher in a college of education in India, as an English language teacher in a Tibetan school, and as a graduate student in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL) and in a college of education in the USA. As a result of my experiences, I have been able to participate in various educational groups and in the process learned both from and with them. I have also learned that teaching is not equal to learning and that good teaching needs ongoing learning opportunities. Teaching is a “learning profession” (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999).

A major impetus for this study comes from the invaluable learning experiences that I have had so far and from my concerns regarding my fellow teachers. I wish my fellow teachers to have similar learning experiences that will motivate them to continue learning and find value in these experiences. I also have a professional responsibility to support and share my experiences, as well as learn from other teachers. With these goals, I wanted to know how teachers in my former school perceive professional development and teacher learning, and how they learn. I also wanted to know how they would feel about working collaboratively in groups to share ideas, discuss challenges, and above all reflect and analyze each other’s work critically to improve their teaching practices and

learn from and with each other. Before being able to design an intervention, I needed to find out what kind of community these teachers are now members of and how well or how poorly it compares to Communities of Practice (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002).

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July 2009

ABSTRACT

Using qualitative field techniques, the researcher explored teacher learning in a small community of English language teachers in a rural Tibetan school in India. From a community of practice perspective teachers were studied in terms of what they practiced, what challenges they faced and how they interacted and learned from and with each other.

The purpose of this study was two-fold: (a) to describe practicing teachers' perception of professional development and teacher learning, and (b) to examine teacher learning from a community of practice perspective. Eight female and two male teachers who taught English participated in the study. Prolonged engagement in the natural setting of the participants yielded a rich description from ethnographic interviews (Spradley, 1979), field notes (Spradley, 1980), from participant observation in classroom with pre- and post-observation conversations. Teacher journals provided another source of data. Interviews were transcribed and returned to participants for further reflection and verification. The transformation of the qualitative data involved three stages: description, analysis, and interpretation (Wolcott, 1994). Findings indicated that the teachers had limited professional development opportunities due to geographical and economical constraints. They preferred professional development experiences that were connected to their day-to-day demands and goals. As a community of teachers their learning mostly resulted from their passion for sharing and concern for others. The teachers talked about commitment and responsibility as some of the greatest motivation for them to learn as teachers.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Overview

Professional development of teachers has emerged as a critical component in school improvement efforts around the world (Bredeson & Johansson, 2000). As Guskey (1995) aptly stated, “Never before in the history of education has there been greater recognition of the importance of professional development. Every modern proposal to reform, restructure, or transform schools emphasizes professional development as a primary vehicle in efforts to bring about needed change.” According to Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman and Yoon (2001), the last decade of the twentieth century produced a significant body of literature on professional development, teacher learning, and teacher change. This body of research literature consists of both large and small scale research studies drawn from “intensive case studies of classroom teaching, evaluations of specific approaches to improving teaching and learning, and surveys of teachers about their preservice preparation and in-service professional development experiences” (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002, p. 82). There is also considerable literature on best practices in professional development, drawing on experiences of expert practitioners (Desimone et al., 2002).

Educational leaders are abandoning the one-size-fits-all mindset of teacher development and emphasizing the need to foster teacher community that will support and promote collaborative inquiry and reflective practice to counter teacher isolation and to improve teaching practice and student learning. Isolated professional learning

experiences do not provide ongoing support and feedback to attain long-term improvements (Mouza, 2002). Only with continuous development of teachers throughout their teaching careers can one “support a teaching community’s development and implementation of practices, and sustain their continual learning and opportunities for professional growth” (Glazer & Hannafin, 2006, p. 180). Moreover, professional learning experiences are more meaningful when they are situated in everyday experiences of the teachers (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991).

Defining Professional Development

Bredeson (2003) defined professional development as “learning opportunities that engage educators’ creative and reflective capacities in ways that strengthen their practice” (p. 34). According to Choy, Chen, and Bugarin (2006), for many years, professional development of teachers comprised short, stand-alone in-service workshops on topics decided by the school’s administrators. Professional development activities that are designed and presented by an external “expert” treat teachers as passive listeners and emphasize private and individual activity focusing on skill development (Hawley & Valli, 1999). To Huberman and Guskey (1995), such in-service teacher development efforts reflect a deficit model of professional development. The outcome of such efforts is reflected in Fullan’s (1991) comment, “Nothing has promised so much and has been so frustratingly wasteful as the thousands of workshops and conferences that led to no significant change in practice when teachers returned to their classes” (p. 315).

Typical top-down nature of traditional professional development sessions are usually remedial, quick fixes or one-shot sessions focusing on a single skill that teachers

appear to lack according to the educational leaders (Fischer, 2004). These one-shot workshops are organized by outside experts who have little knowledge about the teaching and learning contexts of these teachers (Wilson & Berne, 1999). As a result, these “workshop opportunities have been criticized for being decontextualized and contrived” (Wilson & Berne, 1999, p. 174).

For Little (1986), an effective professional development is one that (a) ensures collective collaboration adequate to produce shared understanding, shared investment, thoughtful development, and a fair, rigorous test of selected ideas; (b) requires collective participation in training and implementation; (c) is focused on crucial problems of curriculum and instruction; (d) is conducted often enough and long enough to ensure progressive gains in knowledge, skill, and confidence; and (e) is congruent with and contributes to professional habits and norms of collegiality and experimentation.

Abdal-Haqq (1995) proposed similar characteristics. An effective professional development:

1. Is ongoing.
2. Includes training, practice, and feedback; opportunities for individual reflection and group inquiry into practice; and coaching or other follow-up procedures.
3. Is school-based and embedded in teacher work.
4. Is collaborative, providing opportunities for teachers to interact with peers.
5. Focuses on student learning, which should, in part, guide assessment of its effectiveness.
6. Encourages and supports school-based and teacher initiatives.
7. Is rooted in the knowledge base for teaching.
8. Incorporates constructivist approaches to teaching and learning.
9. Recognizes teachers as professionals and adult learners.
10. Provides adequate time and follow-up support.
11. Is accessible and inclusive. (p. 1)

During the 1980s researchers and specialists in the field of professional development realized that the traditional forms of professional development lacked the focus, intensity, and continuity needed to change classroom practices (Little, 1993). According to Little (1993), the dominant training model of teachers' professional development was inadequate in preparing teachers to meet the complex demands of educational reforms in equally complex contexts of teaching. When educators, researchers, and policy makers began to restructure professional development, alternative forms of professional development began to emerge, as seen in the literature on best practices in professional development (Loucks-Horsley, Hewson, Love, & Stiles, 1998).

Although research on effectiveness of these alternative forms of professional development is relatively rare, some consensus has emerged regarding characteristics of "high-quality" professional development (Desimone et al., 2002; Garet et al., 2001). Hawley and Valli (1999) synthesized the key elements of high-quality professional development that have appeared in the literature on effective professional development and presented them in the form of eight key principles as follows:

1. Driven, fundamentally by analyses of differences between (a) goals and standards for student learning and (b) student performance.
2. Involves learners (such as teachers) in the identification of their learning needs and, when possible, the development of the learning opportunity and/or the process to be used.
3. Is primarily school based and integrated with school operations.
4. Provides learning opportunities that relate to individual needs but for the most part are organized around collaborative problem solving.
5. Is continuous and ongoing, with follow-up and support for further learning, including support from sources external to the school.
6. Incorporates evaluation of multiple sources of information on outcomes for students and processes involved in implementing the lessons learned through professional development.

7. Provides opportunities for teachers to develop a theoretical understanding of the knowledge and skills learned.
8. Is integrated with the comprehensive change process that deals with a full range of impediments to and facilitators of student learning. (p. 137)

Despite this consensus represented in the above list of characteristics of high-quality professional development, there is relatively little research to show how these characteristics relate to improved teacher learning and student achievement (Desimone et al., 2002; Elmore, 2002; Garet et al., 2001; Guskey, 2003). However, literature on professional development efforts that have incorporated all or most of the key elements described by Hawley and Valli (1999) has suggested that these characteristics can have a considerable, positive influence on teacher learning and classroom practice and student achievement (Birman, Desimone, Garet, & Porter, 2000; Garet, et al., 2001; Porter, Garet, Desimone, Yoon, & Birman, 2000).

Teacher Learning

In the introduction to the book, *Teaching as the Learning Profession*, co-edited with Linda Darling-Hammond, Gary Sykes (1999) stressed teacher development:

The improvement of American education relies centrally on the development of a highly qualified teacher workforce imbued with the knowledge, skills and dispositions to encourage exceptional learning in all the nation's students....the key to producing well-qualified teachers is to greatly enhance their professional learning across the continuum of a career in the classroom....Teaching par excellence must become the learning profession in order to stimulate greater learning among students. (p. xv)

According to Wilson and Berne (1999), during the 1990s teacher learning received more attention because of the standards movement and call for more professional development. However, as a field, what we know about teacher learning is limited (Wilson & Berne, 1999). The authors believe that this is partly "due to the

scattered and serendipitous nature of the teachers' learning" (p. 173). Novice teachers learn about school, teaching and learning through what Lortie (1975) called "apprenticeship of observation." Learning opportunities for practicing teachers consist of prepackaged top-down mandatory workshops, individual learning opportunities that they pursue over the course of their career, and learning from the day-to-day experiences of the classroom and conversations with colleagues (Wilson & Berne, 1999). According to Lord (1994), though opportunities for teacher learning in the interstices of the workday are more authentic and practical, these opportunities are happenstance, random, and unpredictable. Wilson and Berne (1999) summarized teacher learning as "a patchwork of opportunities--formal and informal, mandatory and voluntary, serendipitous and planned—stitched together into a fragmented and incoherent curriculum" (p. 174).

Analyzing teacher learning from a situated perspective, Alder (2000) depict teacher learning "as a process of increasing participation in the practice of teaching, and through this participation, a process of becoming knowledgeable in and about teaching" (p. 37). To situated theorists such as Greeno (2003) and Lave and Wenger (1991), learning is social participation. Wenger (1998) summarized the social perspective of learning according to several learning principles. According to these principles, learning (a) is inherent in human nature; (b) is first and foremost the ability to negotiate new meanings; (c) creates emergent structure; (d) is fundamentally experiential and fundamentally social; (e) transforms our identities; (f) constitutes trajectories of participation; (g) means dealing with boundaries; (h) is a matter of social energy and power; (i) is a matter of engagement; (j) is a matter of imagination; (k) is a matter of

alignment; and (1) involves an interplay between the local and the global. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), conventional explanations of learning characterize learning as “a process by which a learner internalizes knowledge, whether ‘discovered’ or ‘transmitted’ from others, or ‘experienced in interaction’ with others” (p. 47). The authors argued that such characterizations reflect far-reaching assumptions regarding the nature of the learner, of the world, and their relations. Lave and Wenger (1991) wrote, “Learning, thinking, and knowing are relations among people engaged in activity in, with, and arising from the socially and culturally structured world” (p. 51). In sum, learning entails increasing participation in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Similarly, drawing on the work of Rogoff (1994, 1997), Wertsch (1991), and Wertsch and Kanner (1992), Oakes, Franke, Quartz and Rogers (2002) grounded their approach to teacher learning in the following five principles:

- Learning occurs as novices participate with each other and experts on meaningful tasks. The desire to participate in more and more competent ways leads participants to try out new strategies and understandings that stretch their skills and capacities and in turn lead to the development of new practices.
- Learning unfolds as individuals participate in groups. This joint participation enables participants to draw on one another's particular knowledge and expertise, thereby expanding their shared repertoire.
- Learning emerges in and through dialogue, often around tools and artifacts connected with practice. Such dialogue provides participants with opportunities to make their knowledge explicit, to argue and challenge one another's beliefs, and to forge new ways of making sense of existing practice.
- Learning involves the emerging identities of participants; these identities develop as knowledge and skills are acquired. In this sense, learners take on new dispositions, skills, and beliefs as they become more competent in practice.
- Learning through mutual engagement in a joint enterprise enables participants to develop socially valued work-products--for example, stories, texts, and presentations--that become tools for further learning. (pp. 229-230)

Shulman's (2004) characterization of effective and enduring learning shares many common elements with the above learning principles. Shulman (2004) pointed out that these learning principles constitute a learning community. Hence, as a community of learners, teachers "must also become a community of practice, moving from deliberation and reflection to action" (Shulman, 2004, p. 501).

Defining Communities of Practice

In the acknowledgements to his book *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, Wenger (1998) gave the credit for originating the term "community of practice" to his colleague Jean Lave although she thought he coined the term. Lave and Wenger (1991) introduced the above term for the first time in their co-authored book, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, in which the authors argued that most conventional explanations of learning have failed to consider its social character. The authors proposed that learning is a process of participation in communities and not just the reception of factual knowledge or information. Such a perspective of learning places the learners in the context of lived experience of participation in the world (Wenger, 1998).

A Community of Practice is a group of practitioners "who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p.4). From this viewpoint, everybody belongs to communities of practice and these communities change over time (Wenger, 1998). We move from one community to another. In some communities of practice, we are core members, whereas in others we

have a more peripheral membership. Wenger (1998) argued that the primary focus of his social theory of learning has broad implications for understanding and supporting learning for individuals, communities, and organizations. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) offered a simple yet detailed description of becoming a member of or creating a community of practice:

These people don't necessarily work together everyday, but they meet because they find value in their interactions. As they spend time together, they typically share information, insight, and advice. They help each other solve problems. They discuss their situations, their aspirations, and their needs. They ponder common issues, explore ideas, and act as sounding boards. They may create tools, standards, generic designs, manuals, and other documents—or they may simply develop a tacit understanding that they share. However they accumulate knowledge, they become informally bound by the value that they find in learning together. This value is not merely instrumental for their work. It also accrues in the personal satisfaction of knowing colleagues who understand each other's perspective and of belonging to an interesting group of people. Over time, they develop a unique perspective on their topics as well as a body of common knowledge, practices, and approaches. They also develop personal relationships and establish ways of interacting. They may even develop a common sense of identity. They become a community of practice. (pp. 4-5)

Tibetan Communities of Practice

In her book, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2006), explained that “the indigenous people’s project has had one major priority: *survival*” (p. 6). The author briefly presented 25 indigenous projects being implemented by indigenous communities with the following survival themes: “cultural survival, self determination, healing, restoration and social justice” (p. 142). Revitalizing and envisioning were among those projects that resonated with the Tibetan communities in exile’s efforts to preserve its language and culture. According to the author, “indigenous languages, their arts and their cultural practices are in various states of

crisis” (p. 147) as a result of colonization, dislocation, epidemic, and oppressions. The Chinese invasion of Tibet not only killed countless Tibetan people but also destroyed thousands of monasteries and eventually dislocated several thousands of Tibetans including the Dalai Lama of Tibet beginning in 1959. Based on his conversations with the Dalai Lama for nine years, Thomas Laird (2006) wrote:

Since 1959, Tibetans who remained in their homeland have followed a course opposite that of their exiled brethren. As Tibetan Buddhism spread throughout the world, China attempted to exterminate the philosophy in Tibet. While communities in exile developed self-governing bodies, Beijing forcibly collectivized all means of production in Tibet. As the idea of Tibet grew in the West, China has tried to erase the nation’s past, present, and future. (p. 344)

About 342,000 Tibetans starved to death as a result of the forced collectivization (Laird, 2006). There was no religious freedom for Tibetans as was evident in Beijing’s destruction of more than 6000 monasteries and temples between 1950 and 1980 (Laird, 2006). The author emphasized, “Monasteries had often been centers of learning in which artists, writers, and doctors were trained. To decimate the monasteries was to strike at the heart of Tibetan culture” (p. 345). The surviving monasteries were destroyed during the infamous “Cultural Revolution” and statues made of gold, silver, and bronze were shipped to China. Laird (2006) explained the reverence Tibetans have for sacred statues:

For Tibetans, the merit in these statues and their sacred presence, like the deities of earth and sky, protected their land. That the spiritual accumulation of the ages could be melted, that concept of cherishing such images could become a crime, shattered ingrained cultural values. Some of the worst horrors of the Cultural Revolution are seen in the tearful eyes of the middle-age Tibetans today, when they explain how, as children, they were forced to dismantle the temples they had built and worshipped in. Many still feel guilty and can never forgive themselves. (p. 345)

Beijing’s treatment of monks and nuns during the Cultural Revolution was unthinkable.

They were forced to work and marry, which was against Buddhist vows; they were the first victims of the Cultural Revolutions (Laird, 2006).

In an effort to destroy the Tibetan language and culture inside Tibet, “under Chinese tutelage, newly minted words littered Tibetan speech to express new ideas” (Laird, 2006, p. 349). In the name of opportunities for higher education thousands of young Tibetans were forced into Chinese-speaking classrooms, which resulted in the loss of their mother-tongue (Laird, 2006). As the author pointed out, the Cultural Revolution was used as “a vehicle for cultural genocide, a means for Chinese to terrorize the Tibetans into assimilation” (p. 348). Hence, the responsibility of the Tibetans outside Tibet is to preserve the Tibetan language and Buddhist culture, besides surviving in a foreign land.

According to Smith (2006), revitalization efforts in language consist of education, broadcasting, publishing and community-based programs. Like the Welsh language program (Smith, 2006), in an effort toward language revitalization, many Tibetan schools in India have started to offer teaching through the medium of Tibetan (Basic Education Policy for Tibetans in Exile, 2005). Through education of the Tibetan children in exile, Tibetans have kept alive their language and Buddhist culture. The every day lives of Tibetans rooted firmly in this Buddhist culture and philosophy has provided them the courage to endure the loss of their country and the resilience to live in exile. Tibetan Buddhism has become a way of life for Tibetans. The Dalai Lama encouraged people to engage in spirituality on a day-to-day basis and affirmed that his mind has become “much

more calm” through his Buddhist training (Dalai Lama & Cutler, 1998, p. 253). The

Dalai Lama elaborated:

I think there has been a change in my attitude towards myself and others. Although it’s difficult to point to the precise causes of this change, I think that it has been influenced by a realization, not full realization, but certain feeling or sense of the underlying fundamental nature or reality, and also through contemplating subjects such as impermanence, our suffering nature, and the values of compassion and altruism. (p. 253)

The Dalai Lama then cited a personal example:

Even when thinking about those communist Chinese who inflicted great harm on some of the Tibetan people, as a result of my Buddhist training, I feel a certain compassion towards even the torturer, because I understand that the torturer was in fact compelled by other negative forces. (p. 253)

In his co-authored book with the Dalai Lama, Victor Chan (2004) asked, “So, to be able to forgive your enemies can make a difference to one’s spiritual progress?” (p. 73) and the Dalai Lama explained:

It’s crucial. It is one of most important thing. It can change one’s life. To reduce hatred and other destructive emotions, you must develop their opposites-- compassion and kindness. If you have strong compassion, strong respect for others, then forgiveness much easier. Mainly for this reason: I do not want to harm another. Forgiveness allows you to be in touch with these positive emotions. This will help with spiritual development. (p. 73)

The Dalai Lama (2000) appealed to the readers to make one’s life meaningful by engaging in spirituality and elaborated:

It consists in nothing more than acting out of concern for others. And provided you undertake this practice sincerely and with persistence, little by little, step by step you will gradually be able to reorder your habits and attitudes so that you think less about your own narrow concerns and more of others. In doing so, you will find that you enjoy peace and happiness yourself.
If you cannot, for whatever reason, be of help to others, at least don’t harm them....try to help in however small a way those who, for whatever reason, cannot or do not help themselves. (pp. 244-245)

The essence of the above Buddhist teachings is captured in the motto of the Tibetan Children's Villages (TCV), "Others Before Self." TCV is an integrated charitable organization working for the care and education of Tibetan refugee children in India under the leadership of the Dalai Lama's sister, Jetsun Pema. Both teachers and children in these schools are encouraged to practice this motto seriously. Children are taught about what the Dalai Lama (2000) called "universal responsibility" (p. 168) and the spiritual qualities necessary to develop a sense of universal responsibility such as "cultivating contentment" (p. 171), "commitment to the principle of honesty" (p. 174), and "justice" (p. 175). While the Tibetans practice these Buddhist teachings to keep them calm and strong at heart and above all to ensure their survival, Tibetan Buddhism has spread around the world. In Laird's (2006) words, "for the first time in its history, Buddhism has firmly established on six continents, and the Tibetans in exile have played a large part in this phenomenon" (p. 343).

Tibetan children are also taught the history of Tibet, its present status as a nation, and the future of Tibet. Tibetans have used "envisioning," a strategy which "indigenous people have employed effectively to bind people together...which asks that people imagine a future, that they rise above present day situations...dream a new dream and set a new vision" (Smith, 2006, p. 152). Educational leaders and teachers have played a significant role in keeping the Tibetan spirit alive and strong in the hearts of the Tibetan children and youth in exile. Despite mixed opinions about the future of Tibet among the Tibetans, the Dalai Lama (Laird, 2006) believes in the spirit of the Tibetans: "the spirit is

strong, and support from outside world is increasing. I feel from a wider perspective there is very much hope” (p. 367).

One major goal of teaching the Tibetan language relates to the critical situation of the country, Tibet. This goal concerns the very survival of the Tibetan people who are living in exile in many parts of the world. Tibetan language teachers have a major responsibility to preserve and maintain their native language. Wiley (2000) calls this “language loyalty.” According to Bright (1992), language loyalty is “a concern to preserve the use of language or the traditional form of a language, when that language is perceived to be under threat” (Vol. 4, p. 310). To Fishman (1981) language loyalty is based upon the persistent attempt to preserve ethnic identity in the face of linguistic and cultural dominance. These two definitions explain the status of Tibetan language in exile.

In a similar vein, Samovar and Porter (2001) stated,

Language is the key to the heart of a culture. So related are language and culture that language holds the power to maintain national and cultural identity. Language is important in ethnic and national sentiment because of its powerful and visible symbolism; it becomes a core symbol for rallying point. (p. 139)

The authors cite several examples of language as a strong symbol of national identity. For example, beginning in the late 1930s through the mid-1950s, the Spanish government made active attempts to destroy the Basque culture and forbade the use of Basque. Costa Rica passed a new law that restricted foreign language usage and fined those who broke it. Iran banned companies from using Western names. Turkey’s government is considering fining anyone who uses foreign names on the airwaves. France has a list of thirty-five hundred foreign words that cannot be used in schools, bureaucracies, or companies. In the case of the Tibetan language inside Chinese occupied Tibet, as more

and more Chinese move into Tibet, the Tibetans are reduced to a minority group. As a result, more and more Tibetans are exposed to Chinese and even forced to learn Chinese for those who can afford school. In fact, Tibetan is banned in these schools.

The state of Tibetan language outside Tibet is influenced by its state inside Chinese-ruled Tibet. In Diehl's (2002) words:

The preservation of linguistic knowledge among children born in exile is deemed especially urgent by many because of the rapid language rate of language loss documented among Tibetans living in Chinese-ruled Tibet, few of whom are now educated in their native language. (p. 218)

Another serious concern for Tibetans living in exile is the fact that children born in the host countries easily pick up the host language and culture. As a result, language loss has become a serious concern for Tibetans living all over the world. The major responsibility of educating the Tibetan children falls on the Tibetan schools in exile. Therefore, a challenge for Tibetan language teachers is maintaining students' interest in the Tibetan language in spite of the rapidly increasing interest in English due to spread of global economy.

With the increasing demand for proficiency in English in the job market and the official language status of English in India, there is an increasing demand on the part of the English teachers to teach students the language skills necessary to survive in the twenty first century. The goals of English instruction have shifted from learning the vocabulary and grammatical rules of English and learning how to read and write in English to attaining both linguistic and communicative competence. However, in institutions such as the Tibetan Children's Village (TCV) schools, teachers have limited access to resources and materials due to economic as well as geographic reasons. For

students in rural schools, their contact and exposure to proficient speakers of English language is the teacher. Therefore, the instructional goal of achieving linguistic and communicative competence in such a limited language learning context constitutes an ongoing challenge for English language teachers in the Tibetan schools.

Because the Tibetan schools are required to follow the Indian curriculum, teachers have limited opportunities to incorporate Tibetan culture in the English classes. The Indian educators have taken into consideration the cultural context of language teaching and the latest textbooks have incorporated Indian culture in the English language textbooks. The Tibetan children learning English using these textbooks find them to have little relevance to their lives. Tibetans teachers are not so much challenged by the fact that they are non-native speakers but rather by the lack of appropriate resources to provide their students with authentic and meaningful learning experiences.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was two-fold: (a) to describe practicing teachers' perception of professional development and teacher learning, and (b) to examine teacher learning from a community of practice perspective. The researcher hoped to provide an understanding of the culture of teacher learning among language teachers in a rural Tibetan school in India. From a community of practice framework, teachers were studied in terms of what they practice, what challenges they face and how they interact and learn both from and with each other.

Research Questions

Drawing on literature and research about professional development of practicing teachers and on teacher learning, the following research questions guided the study:

1. What professional development experiences do teachers perceive as most helpful in promoting teacher learning?
2. What are some of the major constraints to professional development and teacher learning as perceived by teachers?
3. What are characteristics of a professionally developing teacher as perceived by the teachers?
4. How and what are teachers learning from and with one another?
5. What motivates teachers to learn?

Conceptual Framework

To situate professional development and teacher learning within the context of their lived experiences of their daily work, I drew on the notion of communities of practice (CoP) developed by Lave and Wenger (1991). Lave and Wenger's (1991) work is based on a social theory of learning, which Wenger (1998) explains in greater detail in his later work. This conceptual framework for thinking about learning places "learning in our lived experiences of participation in the world" and views "learning as a fundamentally social phenomenon, reflecting our own deeply social nature as human beings capable of knowing" (Wenger, 1998, p. 3). Wenger's (1998) social theory of learning is based on his "assumptions as to what matters about learning and as to the nature of knowledge, knowing, and knowers" (p. 4). The author summarized:

- We are social beings. Far from being trivially true, this fact is a central aspect of learning.
- Knowledge is a matter of competence with respect to valued enterprises – such as singing in tune, discovering scientific facts, fixing machines, writing poetry, being convivial, growing up as a boy or a girl, and so forth.
- Knowing is a matter of participating in the pursuit of such enterprises, that is, of active engagement in the world.
- Meaning – our ability to experience the world and our engagement with it as meaningful – ultimately what learning is to produce. (p. 4)

The primary focus of Wenger's (1998) perspective is learning as social participation where one is an "active participant in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities" which "shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do" (p. 4). Therefore, a social theory of learning includes the following components: meaning, practice, community, and identity, which are interconnected and mutually defining (Wenger, 1998). In sum, learning involves participation in a community of practice.

A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of practitioners "who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). From this viewpoint, everybody belongs to CoP and these communities change over time (Wenger, 1998). We move from one community to another. In some CoP, we are core members, whereas in others we have a more peripheral membership. Wenger (1998) argued that the primary focus of his social theory of learning has broad implications for understanding and supporting learning for individuals, communities, and organizations. A CoP has three main characteristics: "a domain of knowledge, which defines a set of issues; a community of people who care

about the domain; and the shared practice that they are developing to be effective in their domain” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 27).

Significance of the Study

The results of the study will be significant for a number of reasons. First of all, globalization has raised fundamental questions about what knowing means and what learning entails. According to Tsui and Law (2007), “It is no longer sufficient for an individual to acquire expertise within the boundary of one’s own discipline or profession nor is it possible for one to know everything, even in one’s own field” (p.1). Moreover, today, as more and more demand is put on the schools, the demand on teachers’ work escalates to meet the learning needs of the students. Teacher education schools in the past have led to the production and reinforcement of isolated practices and professional isolation in teaching (Lima, 2003). In order to meet these challenges, is it necessary that teachers engage in interactions and communications that will lead to sharing, supporting, and learning within and among these communities? To promote such interactive teacher culture, schools need to support teacher learning by providing opportunities to develop professionally.

During the 1990s, a new paradigm of teacher development emerged as a result of dissatisfaction with the conventional approaches to professional development (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999). “Smylie and Conyers (1991) view the paradigm shift as moving from deficit-based to competency-based approaches, from replication to reflection, from learning separately to learning together, and from centralization to decentralization” (cited in Hawley & Valli, 1999, p. 134). As a result, alternative forms

of professional development emerged. Although research on the effectiveness of these alternative forms of professional development is relatively rare, some consensus has emerged regarding characteristics of high-quality professional development (Desimone et al., 2002; Garet et al., 2001). Hawley and Valli (1999) synthesized the key elements of high-quality professional development that have appeared in the literature on effective professional development and presented it in the form of eight key principles.

Professional development efforts that have incorporated all or most of the key elements described by Hawley and Valli (1999) suggest that these characteristics can have a considerable, positive influence on teacher learning and classroom practice and student achievement (Birman, Desimone, Garet, & Porter, 2000; Garet, et al., 2001; Porter, Garet, Desimone, Yoon, & Birman, 2000). The participatory approach of community of practice as a model for professional development shares many of the characteristics of high-quality professional development and thus has the potential to improve teacher learning.

Teacher education literature attending to professional development of teachers, especially enhancing continuous professional development, tends to be focused on first world contexts (Elliot, 1999). In many of the developing countries, especially in rural and remote schools, professional development is either nonexistent or allocated very few resources. Professional development efforts in these nations, if there are any, are still based on the dominant training model, which often consists of “workshop-type sessions in which the presenter is the expert who establishes the content and flow of the activities” (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1990, p. 241), often ignoring the contextual factors (Little &

McLaughlin, 1993). When geographical and financial constraints are considered, a community of practice as a model for ongoing professional development of teachers might be beneficial for fostering teachers' professional growth.

In education, the concept of communities of practice has been used as a theoretical approach to professional development of teachers and the concept has helped researchers and educators to conceptualize and enact professional development (Pugach, 1999). Moreover, it has also been used as a framework for understanding teacher learning. This study tested the usefulness of community of practice as a framework for examining and understanding teacher learning and what might enhance continuous professional learning. This study adds to the literature on teacher learning and how teachers learn best, furthering our understanding of the relationship of work context to teacher learning.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

In the year 2000, 164 governments adopted the six *Education for All* (EFA) goals and espoused a holistic vision of education. *Universal Primary Education* (UPE) is one of the six EFA goals. According to EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006, 23 countries are at risk of not achieving UPE by 2015 (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005). This report found, “Despite rising enrolments, about 100 million children of primary school age were still not enrolled in primary schools in 2002, of whom 55% were girls. Sub-Saharan Africa, and South and West Asia accounted for 70% of these out-of-school children” (p. 19). The state of the world’s children is further challenged by the fact that many drop out before reaching the last grade or graduate without mastering even a minimum set of skills. The EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005 pointed out “low quality of education system” as not only the major cause for failing children in many parts of the world but also a hindrance in achieving the *Education for All* goals by 2015. *Education for All* cannot be achieved without improving the quality of education for which teachers play a crucial role. Hence, educational reforms and policies designed to improve quality of education would be more beneficial if they focused on the dynamics of the teaching and learning process.

In the United States the “second wave” of school reform has placed teachers and professionalization of teaching at the center of its initiatives (Shulman, 2004). According to Shulman (2004), these reform initiatives have made teacher learning an essential

component of their plans. Although the second wave is making steady progress, “the force of the second wave is being diminished by the undertow created by the first wave” (Shulman, 2004, p. 330). The call for excellence for all students left teachers struggling with “time on task and tasks of covering enormous amounts of material” which in turn left teachers with no time to think (Shulman, 2004, p. 330). Hence, the absence of time has become one of the major obstacles for the current reform initiatives.

The education system in India is in the midst of a period of intensive reform. The recently introduced *National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005* recognized the importance of “learning without burden” and “child-centered learning” (National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2005). The framework has also recognized the importance of teachers, but Batra (2005) pointed out that it did not present clear views or recommendations on how to improve the quality of teachers; she added, “If education is empowerment, then it cannot talk only of students' empowerment. It should include teachers' empowerment” (p. 4351).

The following review of literature will focus on the professional development of teachers that supports ongoing teacher learning. As a theoretical framework for examining and understanding teacher learning, the literature review will also include teacher learning and Community of Practice.

Professional Development of Teachers

“Teachers live, work, and interact with many people yet are alone in professional terms” (Fiszer, 2004, p. ix). According to Fiszer (2004), practitioners rarely observe or are observed by other practitioners, nor do they receive feedback and interact with

colleagues to learn from and with each other. Yet, more than ever, school administrators and educational leaders demand continuous quality teaching and unwavering dedication and effort from the teachers. The standards movement in the US is an apt example. The call for higher standards for teachers became inevitable along with the call for higher standards for students (Wilson & Berne, 1999). Another example of how school administrators and educational leaders demand continuous quality teaching and unwavering dedication and effort from the teachers is the professionalization of teaching. National councils and boards set up missions and standards for professional teachers and teaching (Wilson & Berne, 1999). It is logical that if students need to be taught differently to meet the demands set forth by the new assessment and standards, teachers too need opportunities to develop along those lines. If the goal of instruction is to improve student learning, teacher learning needs to be supported. In Wilson and Berne's words, (1999) "Professional teachers need professional development" (p. 173).

Fiszer (2004) described the reality about traditional professional development for teachers in the following terms:

It is often taught using methods not aligned with active learning. Teachers typically sit and listen to an expert who advocates active, hands-on learning for students but puts little of this talk into practice. Furthermore, the topics are not close to relevant. This style of professional development is not only hypocritical and agonizing but outdated and a disservice to professional educators. (p. ix)

As a part of the Educational Leadership Program at University of California, Los Angeles, Fiszer (2004) conducted a qualitative study to analyze teacher perceptions of professional development. He interviewed, in a focus-group format, 27 teachers, nine tenured teachers from each of three public elementary schools in Los Angeles County.

According to the author, the professional development components in these schools shared many common elements with the components recommended in the literature. The author endeavored to determine whether teachers viewed the professional development structures in their schools as effective, including reflective dialogue, peer observation and consistent feedback. Eighty-two percent of the teachers perceived peer observation as a beneficial professional development strategy. However, 70% felt that experienced teachers are not typically provided with these opportunities. There was unanimous agreement among teachers that opportunities for reflective dialogue are needed to enhance professional learning. In reality, 77% of the teachers felt that these opportunities were rare. More than 50% of the teachers considered constructive feedback from an experienced practitioner as highly beneficial to their learning.

Based on findings from a national probability sample of teachers, professional development providers, and a purposeful longitudinal sample of teachers, Porter, Garet, Desimone and Birman (2003) identified specific characteristics of effective in-service professional development and ways to support such efforts in schools. The researchers drew their results from three coordinated studies designed to evaluate the Eisenhower Professional Development Program, which began in 1996. The data collection procedure included telephone interviews during the 1997-98 school year with a national probability sample of Eisenhower coordinators in 363 school districts and a mail survey of a national probability sample of 1,027 teachers who participated in 657 Eisenhower-assisted activities. During the 1997-98 school year, the researchers conducted in-depth case studies in ten school districts—two school districts in each of five states: Kentucky, New

York, Ohio, Texas, and Washington (Garet, Birman, Porter, Desimone, Herman & Yoon, 1999). During the 1996-97, 1997-98, and 1998-99 school years, the researchers interviewed and conducted classroom observations of teachers in three schools, for a total of 30 schools in the 10 districts selected for in-depth case studies (Porter et al., 2000). The researchers also surveyed all teachers of mathematics or science in the above schools to specifically collect information about instruction during those three different school years. The results indicated that:

Professional development focused on specific, higher order teaching strategies increases teachers' use of those strategies in the classroom. This effect is even stronger when professional development activity is a reform type (e.g., teacher network or study group) rather than a traditional workshop or conference; provides opportunities for active learning; is coherent or consistent with teachers' goals and other activities; and involves the participation from the same subject, grade, or school. (p. 5)

The researchers also found that teachers in these schools did not receive consistent high-quality professional development. Although the results showed little overall change in teaching practice, individual teachers in the same school had different teaching practices.

Based on the findings from these three studies and also from the available literature on best practices, Porter, Garet, Desimone and Birman (2003) proposed six key features of effective in-service professional development. The researchers classified the first three features as structural and the others as core features:

- The form or organization of the activity—that is, whether the activity is organized as a reform type, such as a study group, teacher network, mentoring relationship, committee or task force, internship, individual research project, or teacher research center, in contrast to a traditional workshop or conference;
- The duration of the activity, including the total number of contact hours that participants spend in the activity, as well as the span of time over which the activity takes place;

- The degree to which the activity emphasizes the collective participation of groups of teachers from the same school, department, or grade level, as opposed to the participation of individual teachers from many schools;
- The content focus of the activity—that is, the degree to which the activity is focused on improving and deepening teachers’ content knowledge in mathematics or science;
- The extent to which the activity offers opportunities for active learning—that is, opportunities for teachers to become actively engaged in the meaningful analysis of teaching and learning, example, by reviewing student work or obtaining feedback on their teaching;
- The degree to which the activity promotes coherence between teachers’ professional development and other experiences, for example, by encouraging the continued professional communication among teachers and by incorporating experiences that are consistent with teachers’ goals and aligned with state and district standards and assessments. (p. 25)

In the 1999-2000 School and Staffing Survey (SASS) developed by Choy, Chen, Bugarin (2006), the researchers attempted to determine “the extent to which the characteristics of professional policies and practices were consistent with the emerging consensus on the key features of professional development as described by Hawley and Valli (2001)” (p. iii). This survey covered approximately 4,700 school districts, 12,000 schools, 12,300 principals, 52,400 teachers, and 9,900 school library media centers. The results of the survey indicated that:

- One-third of the teachers strongly agreed that there was a great deal of cooperative effort among staff at their schools.
- Three-quarters of the principals thought that professional development was frequently or always part of teachers’ regular work. About one-third of them reported that they had provided and engaged teachers in professional development at least once a week in the last month and about two-thirds reported that they had tried to build a professional community in their schools that often.
- Almost all schools provided teachers with time for professional development during regular contract hours or by finding ways to free-up time during the school day, either by hiring substitute teachers or adjusting the length of the school day. Reducing teachers’ work load was a less common practice.

- Almost all teachers participated in some type of in-service professional development during the year such as workshops, conferences, or training sessions and some in more innovative ones identified as high quality.
- Teachers' choices for professional development activities were consistent with a focus on improving their knowledge of the subjects they teach.
- More than half of all teachers rated their professional development activities as very useful and the more time teachers spent, the more likely they were to consider it very useful. (pp.77-78)

Norris (2004) conducted a formal study of practitioners' perspectives on staff development efforts and the relation to professional improvement. The sample comprised Pre-K through 12th grade teachers, counselors and various content specialists from seven schools (three inner city elementary, one rural elementary, two suburban middle schools and one inner city magnet high school). The researcher designed a survey to collect the data. The survey was set up to address four broad questions about staff development experiences and participants were asked to rate it using a Likert-type scale of agree, neutral, or disagree. The schools and faculty members were chosen based on their availability. Of the 250 questionnaires (35-36 at each campus) distributed randomly and asked to be completed anonymously, 117 were returned but only 104 were usable. The responses to the four categories were analyzed using a chi-square analysis and responses were found to be highly significant. According to the researcher, "the findings of this study support several points relative to the design, delivery, and implementation of effective staff development for teachers" (p. 10). To summarize the findings:

Practitioners do not perceive typical staff development experiences as bringing about positive change in either teacher perceptions or teaching behaviors and are not well-planned, intellectual exercises, which are supported empirically, or with a reputable body of professional literature. They also believed that staff development for teachers does not focus on activities that stimulate the scholarly interests of adults and tends to marginalize the significance of the work done by educators. (pp. 10-11)

These large scale studies come to similar conclusions regarding teachers' perceptions of effective professional development experiences. Like Fiszer (2004), most researchers recommended an ongoing and collaborative professional development model. Ball (1996) emphasized the importance of teaching and learning context in designing an effective professional development program, adding, "The most effective professional development model is thought to involve follow-up activities, usually in the form of long-term support, coaching in teachers' classrooms, or ongoing interactions with colleagues" (p. 501-502). The author argued that teachers should control their professional development. According to Fiszer (2004), "Teachers deserve better and can have what they need in a relatively inexpensive manner—by being given the time and wherewithal to learn from one another. Ongoing professional development fosters the kind of support teachers do not have within their traditional culture of isolation" (p. x). The conclusion drawn was that an ongoing model of professional development would support and enhance reflection, active learning, interaction, collaboration, collegiality, all situated within the context of teachers.

According to Buysse, Sparkman, and Wesley (2003), "a promising approach to this type of practice research is to build *communities of practice* based on collective expertise and designed to scrutinize and improve education" (p. 265). The concept of communities of practice as a theoretical approach to the professional development offers the following benefits:

The potential for practitioners and researchers to co-construct knowledge exists in this model because communities of practice represent an ongoing enterprise that invites both groups to share, build upon, and transform what they know about effective practices. Because the focus is not on a single research study or

professional development program, but rather the development of a professional community, fundamental changes in how researchers and practitioners establish mutual trust and sustain long-term relationships can be expected. (Buysse et al., 2003, p. 265)

Across all the studies reviewed in this section, teachers shared similar perceptions regarding effective professional development experience. Some of the most common features identified were opportunities for active learning, collaboration, reflective dialogue, constructive feedback, and coherence.

Teacher Learning

Learning has been found to be a crucial element in promoting organizational productivity, change, and survival (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Senge, 1990). During the last two decades, teacher learning has gained more prominence in education literature. Despite this growing emphasis, there is only a limited amount of research on the effects of teacher learning on teaching and student learning or of the advantages of different approaches (Smylie, 1996). On the other hand, the challenges posed by the nature of teacher's work, subject matter, and student population of today's world cannot be met with prevailing approaches to teacher development. Teachers need ongoing teacher learning opportunities and support (Lieberman, 1995; Sarason, 1990).

According to Smylie (1996), the best directions and ideas for promoting teacher learning come from theories of adult learning and learning-to-teach literature. The author found that the two sources arrive at similar conclusions about adult learning (Smylie, 1995, 1996). For example, Grossman (1992) argued that teachers must understand that knowledge is situated in particular physical and social contexts. Teachers learn best when they are active learners and are able to relate their learning to their day-to-day work

(Sprinthall, Reiman & Theis-Sprinthall, 1996; Smylie, 1995) and “resolve tensions between abstract principles and the complexity of the classroom practice” (Cohen, 1990; Lampert, 1984 in Smylie, 1995, p. 107). Grossman (1992) also emphasized collegiality as another important characteristic in learning-to-teach, which is invaluable for generating new ideas and providing feedback about practice to each other. These theories also emphasize teachers’ opportunities to learn:

Teachers’ opportunities to learn should be problem-oriented, and grounded in inquiry, experimentation, and reflection.... collaborative, involving interaction with other teachers and educational professionals as sources of new ideas and feedback.... coherent, intensive, and ongoing.... instrumentally connected, at least in part, to broader goals for student learning and school improvement. (Smylie, 1996, p. 10)

In their *Community of Learners Project*, Thomas, Wineberg, Grossman, Myhre and Woolworth (1998) brought together teachers from the English and history departments at a large urban high school in a community of learners to engage teachers with subject matter. According to the researchers, the goal of this model of professional development was to promote teachers’ ongoing intellectual development. The teachers met twice a month for two years and took part in three activities: reading books together, developing an interdisciplinary humanities curriculum, and making initial efforts to establish video clubs. Sources of data included regular interviews with teachers, think-aloud protocols of individual teachers, transcripts of project meetings, records of e-mail correspondence among participants, and ethnographic field notes. The findings reported in this particular article came from a preliminary analysis of some of the data. The researchers focused on a subset of teachers with differing levels of experience and reported on what they learned from their participation in the project. The teachers’ initial

responses indicated that they were experiencing an “enhanced collegiality among faculty within and across departments; reduced teacher isolation; and the development of an intellectual community of teachers within the high school” (p. 21). The researchers also found that how the project influenced the teachers varied depending on the teachers’ career trajectory.

In a qualitative study of teachers in four different subject departments in two secondary schools in separate parts of England, Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2003), studied school teachers’ workplace learning. The research was part of the network “Improving Incentives for Learning in Workplace.” This network functioned as part of the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP). The researchers spent alternate terms in each school for a period of years (six school terms) and collected data from a wide range of sources: “national policy document; documentary evidence from the schools and of teachers working within their departments; and semi-structured interviews with the teachers about their career histories and their learning as teachers” (p. 6). According to the researchers, their “primary focus was on teachers’ current learning and the factors that influenced it, rather than a full life-history approach” (p. 6). In this particular work, the researchers reported on the learning of one female teacher, who was an experienced head of an art department. The case study findings indicated that teachers’ learning is “best understood through the mutually constitutive interrelationships between her dispositions, the departmental community of practice within which she works, and wider policy and management issues, related to the school and UK government approaches to school education and teacher learning” (pp. 6-7). Findings from this study

also indicated that the two major obstacles to promote teachers' learning in workplace were time and funding.

Another source of guidance for promoting teacher learning comes from the best-practices literature, which is consistent with the adult learning theories and learning-to-teach literature and has suggested various approaches to promote teacher learning (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1990; Sprinthall, et al., 1996). Literature on best-practices includes individually guided study, clinical supervision, and training; interactive learning from curriculum and instructional development and school improvement; and individual and collaborative inquiry, such as action and teacher research (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1990 in Smylie, 1996). This literature challenges the idea of teacher training that had dominated teacher education for a long time. This literature supports the teachers' workplace as a significant source of teacher learning (Smylie, 1995) and also points to the benefits of learning outside the school in collaboratives, networks, subject matter associations, and teacher centers (Lieberman, 1995; Little, 1993).

Using a focused ethnography approach, Little (1982) interviewed 105 teachers and 14 administrators in six schools, four of which were characterized as relatively successful schools and two as relatively unsuccessful schools. In this 1-year study, the researcher attempted to find what organizational characteristics in schools were conducive to continued workplace learning. The study also drew its data from observations: in the classrooms of 80 teachers, 6 inservice meetings, and in the hallways, lunchrooms, faculty meeting, lounges, offices, and grounds of the six schools. Findings indicated that:

In successful schools more than in unsuccessful ones, teachers valued and participated in norms of collegiality and continuous improvement (experimentation); they pursued a greater range of professional interaction with fellow teachers or administrators, including talk about instruction, structured observation, and shared planning and preparation. They did so with greater frequency, with a greater number and diversity of persons and locations, and more concrete and precise shared language. (p. 235)

Based on the data collected from interviews and from observations, the researcher constructed an “illustrative inventory of characteristics of teacher interactions in six schools” (p. 330). According to the researcher, these situated interactions were quite demanding on “teachers’ time, knowledge, experience, and good will” (p. 329). They also added to “persons’ competence, confidence, influence, and satisfaction,” (p. 329) and seemed to support continuous staff development. These interactions were the characteristics of “being a teacher” (p. 329) in these six schools.

Smylie (1989) reported on teachers’ views of the effectiveness of sources of learning sources to teach. The April 1985 National Education Association’s (NEA) Conditions and Resources of Teacher Survey provided the data for this study. The survey was mailed to a national random sample of 2,530 NEA member teachers. This study reported on teachers’ rating of effectiveness of each of the 14 sources of learning identified by NEA using a Likert-type scale. The survey had a very good response rate (71%) and most of the teachers were elementary teachers, followed by senior high, middle school, junior high. The majority of the teachers were regular classroom teachers and 50% of the respondents taught in rural schools. The data was broken down by grade level and by school setting. The researcher conducted a series of t-tests to analyze and compare the responses. Results of the data analysis indicated that “teachers perceived

direct experiences in classroom as their most effective source of learning” (p. 545). This source was followed by a group of sources—consultation with other teachers, individual study and research, and teachers’ observations of their teaching colleagues.

This group of sources is followed by graduate courses in fields of specialization (subject-matter areas taught) and consultation with grade-level or subject-matter specialists, which were rated significantly higher than undergraduate courses in subject-matter areas and professional conferences and workshops other than those provided by the respondents’ school districts. (p. 545)

The least effective group of learning sources consisted of “graduate courses in education, formal evaluation of teaching performance, consultation with building-level administrators, undergraduate education courses and in-service training provided to teachers’ school districts” (p. 545). School grade level comparisons indicated significant differences in the levels of effectiveness of sources of learning sources to teach whereas it was consistent across each setting.

Smylie (1995) urged, “If we wish to improve school as places for teachers to learn, we need to identify those workplace conditions that promote or constrain learning” (p. 94). The studies reviewed in this section arrived at similar conclusions. One of the most important conditions that promoted learning in the workplace was to situate teacher learning in their day-to-day work. Others included resources: time and money, “opportunities for individuals to work with and learn from others on an ongoing basis,” “the nature of collective learning opportunities,” “distribution of power and authority,” and “the nature of individual’s work” (Smylie, 1995, p. 103-104).

Community of Practice

Lave and Wenger (1991) introduced the term Community of Practice for the first time in their co-authored book *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* in which the authors argued that most conventional explanations of learning have failed to view its social character. Moreover, most accounts of learning view “learning as a process by which a learner internalizes knowledge, whether ‘discovered,’ ‘transmitted’ from others, or ‘experienced in interaction’ with others” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 47). The authors proposed that learning is a process of participation in communities and not just the reception of factual knowledge or information. Such a perspective of learning places the learners in the context of lived experience of participation in the world (Wenger, 1998).

According to Wenger (1998), different learning theories focus on different aspects of learning and adds:

To some extent these differences in emphasis reflect a deliberate focus on a slice of the multidimensional problem of learning, and to some extent they reflect more fundamental differences in assumption about the nature of knowledge, knowing, and knowers, and consequently about what matters in learning. (p. 4)

Wenger (1998) proposed a social theory of learning based on his “assumptions as to what matters about learning and as to the nature of knowledge, knowing, and knowers” (p. 4).

The author summarized:

1. We are social beings. Far from being trivially true, this fact is a central aspect of learning.
2. Knowledge is a matter of competence with respect to valued enterprises—such as singing in tune, discovering scientific facts, fixing machines, writing poetry, being convivial, growing up as a boy or a girl, and so forth.
3. Knowing is a matter of participating in the pursuit of such enterprises, that is, of active engagement in the world.

4. Meaning—our ability to experience the world and our engagement with it as meaningful—ultimately what learning is to produce (p. 4).

The primary focus of Wenger's (1998) perspective is 'learning as social participation' where one is an "active participant in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities" which "shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do" (p. 4). In sum, learning involves participation in a community of practice.

A Community of Practice is a group of practitioners "who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p.

4). It consists of three basic elements: (a) domain; (b) community; and (c) practice.

- The domain creates common ground and a sense of common identity. A well-defined domain legitimizes the community by affirming its purpose and value to members and other stakeholders. The domain inspires people to contribute and participate, guides their learning, and gives meaning to their actions. Knowing the boundaries and the leading edge of the domain enables members to decide exactly what is worth sharing, how to present their ideas, and which activities to pursue. It allows them to recognize the potential in tentative or half-baked ideas.
- The community creates the social fabric of learning. A strong community fosters interactions based on mutual respect and trust. It encourages a willingness to share ideas, expose one's ignorance, ask difficult questions, and listen carefully ... Community is an important element because learning is a matter of belonging as well as an intellectual process, involving the heart as well as the head.
- The practice is a set of frameworks, ideas, tools, information, styles, language, stories, and documents that community members share. (pp. 27-29)

In their examination of several prominent models of collaborative inquiry, including communities of practice, Wesley and Buysse (2001) identified several common key elements among these models (e.g., emphasis on dialogue and interaction among professionals about professional knowledge and practice, ongoing reflection and inquiry).

However, collaborative inquiry models such as learning organizations, action research, learning communities in higher education, and professional development schools differed in scope when compared with the communities of practice model (Wesley & Buysse, 2001). Communities of practice with its practice-based approach offers a wider scope in terms of level of participation from the members as a member of the community of practice. For instance, Barab and Duffy (2000) emphasized the “development of self through participation in the community” as an important element that distinguishes itself from other models.

The use of communities of practice as a framework for understanding and promoting teacher learning and as a particular theoretical approach to professional development is not new to the education literature. The following two projects brought together teachers and researcher and provided opportunities to critically reflect on their practices and in the process develop new kinds of discourse communities for teachers. Palincsar, Magnusson, Marano, Ford, and Brown (1998) described the building of a community of practice of science teachers. The researchers recruited 18 teachers who taught in grades kindergarten through five with teaching experiences ranging from 1 to 30 years. These teachers came from 14 schools located in six districts serving low income children. The first two researchers and a number of doctoral students joined the school-based members. The members engaged in inquiry-based science teaching which they refer to as Guided Inquiry supporting Multiple Literacies (GIsML). The group participated in five principal activities: (a) experiencing GIsML as a learner, (b) making connections between being learners and teachers in a GIsML context, (c) collaborative

planning and teaching of GIsML, (d) implementation of GIsML instruction in each classroom, and (e) debriefing with community members regarding experience with GIsML teaching. According to the researchers, the above list did not include all activities that the community was engaged in. These particular activities emerged as the most important ones in the community experience of the teachers.

Another example of a community of practice comes from Perry, Walton and Calder's (1999) study. This study brought together 14 general and special education teachers who were employed by Coquitlam School District near Vancouver, BC. This community of teachers represented a range of teaching experiences (2-20 years) and educational backgrounds. All these teachers shared an interest in early literacy and teacher development. The community met 10 times over a period of 15 months with each meeting lasting for three hours. The researchers facilitated the five activities: free write, air time, focus group, work time, and reporting out in each of the community meetings. Through these meetings the teachers received "guided and sustained opportunities to design and implement assessments of young children's reading and writing that reflect contemporary approaches to literacy instruction" (p. 218). The researchers concluded that "teachers valued opportunities to learn from one another, to set their own professional development agenda, and having time to plan, experiment, and reflect on their assessment practices" (p. 218). Their learning in the community was reflected in the quality of the assessments they designed during the project and also in the increased confidence in making professional judgements.

These two studies lend credence to the notion that cognition is distributed and suggest that individual participating teachers bring with them different types of knowledge and areas of expertise when they come together in discourse communities in which members share and learn from and with each other about teaching and learning (Putnam & Borko, 2000). However, Putnam and Borko (2000) also point to the fact that such discourse communities are rare in many schools. According to Ball (1994), many professional development programs offer only limited opportunities for meaningful interaction:

The common view that “each teacher has to find his or her own style” is a direct result of working within a discourse of practice that maintains the individualism and isolation in teaching. This individualism not only makes it difficult to develop any sense of common standards, it also makes it difficult to disagree. Making disagreement hides the individual struggle to practice wisely, and so removes an opportunity for learning. Politely refraining from critique and challenge, teachers have no basis for forum for debating and improving their understandings. To the extent that teaching remains a smorgasbord of alternatives with no real sense of community, there is no basis for comparing or choosing from among alternatives, no basis for real and helpful debate. This lack impedes the capacity to grow. (p. 16)

The community of practice (CoP) frame for conceptualizing teacher learning offered in the above studies helps us understand the variety of ways through which teacher learning can be promoted, supported and sustained. A CoP could be an invaluable structure in schools if cultivated actively and systematically.

All the studies reviewed in this section on professional development and teacher learning seemed to arrive at similar conclusions regarding what professional development experiences were beneficial in promoting and sustaining teacher learning. Despite the fact that consensus exists regarding the features of an effective professional development

program, teachers in most of the studies commented on the lack of opportunities for learning and lack of consistent high-quality professional development experiences in their schools. When it comes to workplace learning, time and funding were seen as the major hurdles that teachers and administrators needed to overcome to support teacher learning. Teachers reported that learning experiences that were situated in their day-to-day work, involved them in collaborative learning efforts, enhanced their collegiality among faculty, and involved them as active learners as the most effective factors in helping them learn from and with each other.

Despite the generalizability of findings of these large scale studies in western contexts, particularly in English speaking countries, the context of this proposed study is different than in western countries. As Bredeson (2003) stated in discussing his proposed new architecture for professional development: “The new architecture for professional development is not about creating the one, best model. The illusion and establishing the best professional development practice does not fit the realities of schools nor the complexities of who teaches and administrators are and what they do” (p. xvii). The Tibetan school in a rural Indian state which is the setting for this study is quite different from most western schools in countries. Differences result from the difference in history, culture, students, staff, goals, community setting, and resources. It must be remembered that the studies that form theoretical bases for this study were conducted in western educational and cultural context. Therefore, caution must be used in generalizing the results of such studies to the context of this study. This is a challenge, which if handled well, will enhance our understanding of teacher learning beyond western contexts.

So far, what we have in all the Tibetan schools are departments such as, Tibetan, Arts, Math and Science, etc. Each of these groups of people have the potential to grow into communities of practice and achieve their full potential if the schools can “create an environment in which they can prosper: valuing the learning they do, making time and other resources available for their work, encouraging participation, and removing barriers” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 13). In this study, the concept of CoP will be used as a theoretical framework for understanding teacher learning in a Tibetan school in India.

Although case study is the most prominent research method used in teacher education and staff development research (Richardson & Placier, 2001), the present study was conducted using ethnography. Doing ethnography allowed the researcher to explore teacher learning at a much deeper level and account for the context differences that distinguishes this proposed study from the rest of the studies conducted in western contexts. The researcher’s role as a participant-observer allowed the researcher to study the culture of teacher learning as they do their everyday teaching. Potential bias as a native researcher studying the culture of Tibetan teachers was balanced by my ability to assume a unique role as a researcher, having access rare for western researchers. My language skills in English and in Tibetan, the native language, contributed greatly, not only in enhancing communication and interactions with the participants but also to establishing a comfort level with participants. Narayan’s (1993) addressed this question about native anthropologists:

“Native” anthropologists, then, are perceived as insiders regardless of their complex backgrounds. The differences between kinds of “native” anthropologists

are obviously passed over. Can a person from an impoverished American minority background who, despite all prejudices, manages to get an education and study her own community be equated with a member of a Third World elite group who, backed by excellent schooling and parental funds, studies anthropology abroad yet returns home for fieldwork among the less privileged? Is it not insensitive to suppress the issue of location, acknowledging that a scholar who chooses an institutional base in the Third World might have a different engagement with western-based theories, books, political stances, and technologies of written production? Is a middle-class white professional researching aspects of her own society also a “native” anthropologist? (p. 677)

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Overview

The purpose of this study was two-fold: (a) to describe practicing teachers' perception of professional development and teacher learning, and (b) to examine teacher learning from a community of practice perspective. The researcher hoped to provide a better understanding of the culture of teacher learning among language teachers in a rural Tibetan school in India. From a community of practice framework, teachers were studied in terms of what they practice, what challenges they face and how they interact and learn both from and with each other. The researcher spent 10 months in the natural setting of the participants collecting data using qualitative data gathering techniques. Ethnographic interviews (Spradley, 1979) provided the primary data for the study. Data was also collected in the form of field notes through participant observation (Spradley, 1980), which included classroom observations and pre- and post-observation conversations with the participants. Journals written by teachers provided another source of data. Interviews were transcribed and returned to participants for further reflection and verification.

Research Questions

Drawing on literature and research on professional development of practicing teachers and on teacher learning, the following research questions guided the study:

1. What professional development experiences do teachers perceive as most helpful in promoting teacher learning?

2. What are some of the major constraints to professional development and teacher learning as perceived by teachers?
3. What are characteristics of a professionally developing teacher as perceived by the teachers?
4. How and what are teachers learning from and with one another?
5. What motivates teachers to learn?

Research Design

In planning this study, one of the challenges concerned the very definition of ethnography as explained in the literature. For instance, Morse and Richards (2002) define ethnography as follows:

Ethnography is best conducted by researchers who are not part of the cultural group (i.e., from the etic perspective) and is facilitated by researchers' comparing and contrasting two cultures. If a researcher shares the participants' culture (as in the emic, or insider, perspective), then it is difficult for him or her to "see" the beliefs, values, practices, and behaviors embedded in everyday life. The research will be easier, and the differences more evident, if the researcher is an outsider. (p. 49)

Furthermore, the authors specified the work of an ethnographer as "to become as integrated as possible into the lives of the people they are studying" holding a researcher stance "outside the group being studied, yet the data collection procedures are designed to elicit emic data (i.e., data reflecting the native point of view)" (p. 50). I think these explanations not only underestimate but undermine the role of native researchers.

If I were to closely adhere to these definitions and explanations, my qualitative research would not qualify as ethnography. Should I even be worried about finding an appropriate label for my research? My data collection techniques involved participant

observation and ethnographic interviewing, which are ethnographic techniques. Spradley (1979, 1980), however indicates that these two data collection methods are “culturally sensitive and appropriate” (Smith, 2006) for the purposes of my research. My research has benefited immensely, providing emic insights from my role as a native researcher using these techniques, but as a native researcher who has lived abroad for seven years, which also provides a less than involved perspective. According to Spradley (1979):

Until recently, ethnography was largely relegated to small, non-western cultures. The value of studying these societies was readily accepted--after all, we didn't know much about them and we couldn't conduct surveys or experiments, so ethnography seemed appropriate. However, the value of ethnography in understanding our own society was often overlooked. (p. 15)

The author emphasized that ethnography should be used “for understanding the human species, but also for serving the needs of humankind. One of the greatest challenges facing every ethnographer is to synchronize these two uses of research” (Spradley, 1979, p. 16). He explained how to achieve that synchronization:

One way to synchronize the needs of the people and the goals of ethnography is to consult with informants to determine urgent research topics. Instead of beginning with theoretical problems, the ethnographer can begin with informant-expressed needs, then develop a research agenda to relate these topics to the enduring concerns with the social science. Another way is through “strategic research” in which one begins with an interest in human problems rather than in some particular culture, part of the world, or theoretical concern. These problems suggest needed changes and information needed to make such changes. (p. 15)

As for my research, I can not claim that I have achieved this synchronization but I have addressed some of the teachers' problems. I began my research with an interest in teacher learning coupled with an enduring concern for my fellow teachers' professional learning and growth.

The researcher spent 10 months in the natural setting of the participants collecting data using qualitative data gathering techniques to produce a rich description of communities of language teaching practice. Ethnographic interviews (Spradley, 1979) provided the primary source of data for the study. Data was also collected in the form of field notes through participant observation (Spradley, 1980) which included observations of classroom teaching accompanied by pre- and post-observation conversations with the participants. Teacher journals provided another source of data.

The social situation chosen for participant observation was an English language classroom. According to Spradley (1980), when one is deciding a social situation, “you should look for ones that offer the best opportunities for participation” (p. 51). With my English teaching background and with my knowledge of the students, having taught in the school in the past, I had excellent opportunities for participation. In each classroom, the actors included the English teacher, the students and the researcher. The activities included teaching, learning, and other related activities. Though the primary source of data was interview transcripts, participant observation provided the foundation for that data. This type of research approach has potential to lead to the development of relationships and the researcher felt this was the case.

Setting

The setting for this study is a rural Tibetan school in one of the states in northern India called Himachal Pradesh (H. P.). Situated in the heart of western Himalayas, Himachal Pradesh is a mountainous state with altitudes ranging from 350 to 7000 meters (1050 ft. to 21000 ft.) above the sea level.

This school originally started as an adult education school in 1986 at Bir by the Cabinet Secretariat of the Central Tibetan Administration in exile. It was called the New Tibetan School consisting of a few rental houses. This school started with 68 students who lived and studied in rental houses. All the students were recent arrivals from Tibet who needed help not only in education but to survive in the foreign land.

In 1990, the Cabinet Secretariat entrusted the responsibility of running the school to Tibetan Children's Villages (TCV). At that time there were already 322 young adults with many more joining daily. The school had neither proper curriculum nor adequate infrastructure. Today at this TCV school location, there are two schools taking care of 2035 students (1150 boys & 885 girls), employing 152 staff members, a majority of whom are teachers. The two schools are known more commonly as the Junior Section and the Senior Section. The study took place in the Senior Section. The students in both these schools are all recent escapees from Tibet, especially the older ones. These students first arrive in Nepal and the reception center there sends them to the reception center in Dharamsala, India, and then they are finally sent to one of the above schools. Upon their arrival, depending on their age, they are either admitted to the Junior Section (14 years and younger) or to the Senior Section (14 years and older). These schools function like any other grade level school except that they have something called the OC classes, which means "Opportunity Classes." This OC system was designed to meet the needs of the older students who cannot afford to start school from the beginning. In these OC classes, they are taught English, Tibetan, and mathematics, receiving two hours of instruction in each of these subjects every day.

The Senior Section consists of two levels of OC classes: OC I (first year) and OC II (second year), each with many sections. According to the headmaster of the school, in March 2007 the school had barely two sections in OC I: OC I A and OC I B, which was only half filled. At the end of the year, they had OC I A through OC I K. This was mainly because enrollment is open throughout the year. As newcomers arrive on the school campus they are sent into the last OC I section and as each section fills up (classroom capacity 38-40 students) they start another section. As a result, the school is always short of both classrooms and teachers. The 2007 academic session started on March 1st with 1,459 students and during the year the school had about 370 new admissions.

When I arrived on campus in September 2007, there were already three OC I classes being held in the school hall, one on the lawn which slowly migrated to a verandah of one classroom as it got colder, and soon classes for another group were held on that lawn. Students keep pouring in all through the year and the school can not refuse to take them because they have nowhere else to go. Moreover, many of them have never had a chance to go to school as they were busy either rearing animals or working in the fields in some remote Tibetan village or town where schools are unheard of. The schools get all kinds of students. For example, many of them arrive with some kind of schooling in Tibet. They had to discontinue their schools because they could no longer afford the high school fees. The teachers were told that there are two kinds of schools in Tibet: the ones that teach Tibetan and the ones that do not teach Tibetan. Most of these students would have learned Chinese and mathematics quite well and the ones who attended the schools that taught Tibetan would have learned Tibetan too. Having worked as an English

teacher in the same school in the past, I know that most of them come to school with no knowledge of English and the majority are very enthusiastic about learning it.

All these students are put in OC I for one school session and then sent to OC II for another year. Based on their performance on the three examinations that they take during the year, like any other grade level class, they are put into the different sections beginning with OC II A, OC II B, and so on. At the end of their OC II school year, they all are required to take a common exam. Those who do not meet the required standard are given a chance to enroll in a vocational training course. The high achievers have a chance to jump to seventh grade. The rest of them go to sixth grade. Thus, these two years are very critical for the students. This TCV school offers classes until 10th grade. After 10th grade, the students are sent to other TCV schools which have 11th and 12th grade after which the successful ones attend Indian colleges.

Participants

The participants for this study were English language teachers. Ten volunteered to participate in the study after reading the letter of request which was given to all the 15 English teachers of that Tibetan school. Of the eleven teachers from whom I received signed letters of consent, one participant left her job for good. The study therefore involved ten teachers, two of whom did not participate in the lesson observation part of the study. Five of them also taught a few social studies classes along with English. This research focused on teachers who were assigned to English language classes to investigate how they learned as teachers.

Four of the participants hold primary teaching certificates (TTC) required to teach grades one through five/six. Of these four, two of them were working on undergraduate degrees through correspondence courses offered by an Indian university at the time of the study. The remaining six hold teacher education degrees required to teach grades six through ten, which is known in India as Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Education, commonly known by its abbreviation B. A. B. Ed. A few of them also have a graduate (master's degree) degree and one is pursuing his graduate degree through a correspondence course offered by an Indian university.

This Tibetan school functions like a typical boarding school. For teachers, working and living in this school entails responsibility for a variety of co-curricular activities. The activities range from a two-year term house master to that of a weekly master-on-duty. The latter require them to supervise the morning and evening study time, each lasting for an hour and a half. The house master's responsibility is assigned to eight teachers with two for each house. All the students and staff are divided among the four houses and they come together to compete in all the games, sports, and cultural activities each academic session that provides much of the entertainment for the school and neighboring villages. Therefore, for a house master, in addition to the teaching responsibilities, this role demands a considerable amount of background knowledge and skills or ways to access resources to fulfill these demands.

The students are supervised by a system of class monitors, school prefects and captains, house prefects, house masters, hostel wardens. In addition to that each year, the school (staff) elects members of the School Advisory Committee who are responsible for

monitoring the students' overall discipline including the lights-out time in the hostels, which is a scheduled bedtime for all the students. The last column in table 1 lists the specific responsibilities the participating teachers had during the 2007 and 2008 academic session.

Table 1

Participating Teachers' Profiles

Participants	Years Teaching	Grade Teaching (2007 & 2008)	Teaching Certificate	Co-curricular Responsibilities (2007 & 2008 academic sessions)
Participant 1	6	OC, 6	TTC	Advisor: School's English Newsletter Member: OC Teachers' Committee
Participant 2	14	OC, 6	TTC	Member: School's Advisory Committee Organizer: English Quiz Incharge: Grade 7 Life Skills
Participant 3	7	OC, 7	TTC	Organizer: English Debate
Participant 4	12	9, 10	TGT	Member: School's Advisory Committee Advisor: School's English Magazine Organizer: Senior English Essay Contest
Participant 5	12	OC, 6	TTC	Member: School's Advisory Committee Member: OC Teachers' Committee Organizer: English Elocution Contest Incharge: Gardening Club (table continues)

Participants	Years Teaching	Grade Teaching (2007-2008)	Teaching Certificate	Co-curricular Responsibilities (2007 & 2008 academic sessions)
Participant 6	2	6, 10	TGT	House Master Member: School's Advisory Committee Organizer: Junior English Essay Contest
Participant 7	3	8, 9	TGT	House Master Advisor: School's English Magazine Member: School's Advisory Committee
Participant 8	8	8, 9	TGT	Member: School's Advisory Committee Advisor: School's English Magazine
Participant 9	9+1	8, 9	TGT	Organizer: English Debate
Participant 10	8	9, 10	TGT	Advisor: School's English Newsletter Member: School's Advisory Committee

Key: OC=Opportunity Class, TTC=Teachers' Training Certificate, TGT=Trained Graduate Teacher

Research Procedures

Getting Access

I obtained permission from the school principal both to contact teachers regarding my research and to stay on campus. After his consent, I sent 15 letters, one to each of the English language teachers of the school, inviting them to participate in the study. The letter contained a lay summary of my study including what role I would like my participants to play in my research and assuring them that their participation was completely voluntary. I received 11 signed letters of consent from the teachers, for a response rate of 73.3 percent. (See Appendix A for copies of the contact letter and letter of consent).

To confirm participation in the research and respond to any questions or concerns regarding the research procedures, I organized a working dinner for September 22, soon after I arrived at the field site. I sent out a notice to the concerned teachers and also invited the school director, principal, headmaster and assistant headmaster for the dinner too. The director was unable to attend the dinner but he said that he was very happy to have me on campus. I asked the principal to inform the teachers that my research and their participation would not be used for any kind of teacher evaluation. Despite my early notice, three of the teachers could not attend. One of them had specifically informed me that she would be unable to participate in any activity or meeting that was scheduled after 4 p.m. (i.e., the end of school hours).

After dinner, the school principal, headmaster and assistant headmaster went home, leaving me to respond to the teachers' questions and concerns regarding my

research. I also distributed a notebook (300 pages) for the participants to use as their journal book and requested them to record at least one entry per week on teacher learning starting from September 24. Many of them assumed that they would have to write the journal every single day, which would be too much work for them. Due to lesson observation experiences and their understanding of what a lesson observation involved, many of them were also somewhat uncomfortable with the proposed lesson observation. Therefore, I explained as best as I could what my lesson observation would entail and what its purpose was. However, those teachers who had already decided not to participate in the lesson observation did not change their minds. I even joked and asked one teacher, "Have you changed your mind now?" but I received a prompt response, "No, I don't want to do the lesson observation part." I replied to her calmly, "That's ok and thank you for your willingness to participate in the interview and journal writing."

One of the first things I had done upon my arrival at the field site was to request a copy of the 11 teachers' class time table from the school Headmaster so that I could decide beforehand which class to observe for each of the teachers and organize my schedule accordingly. However, I also told them that if they preferred a grade level or section other than the one I had chosen, I was willing to accommodate their preference. No one requested any changes. I decided to start lesson observation with two teachers on Monday, September 24, and asked for two volunteers. Two teachers volunteered and their class hours worked out fine. A couple of teachers said that they were happy that I was doing my study in their school and thanked me for giving them that opportunity. The

meeting appeared to be successful in attaining its goal and establishing rapport with the participants.

Later when the week started I met individually with the three teachers who had not attended the dinner. Again, one of the teachers said that she was thinking about not participating in the lesson observation and I told her to think over it and let me know when she had decided. I even told her that she could talk to the teachers who were being observed to find out what participation involved and then let me know. However, she told me that she had decided not to participate in the lesson observation. I told her that was fine and did not ask for any reasons, but made a note to pay particular attention to her while interviewing.

Lesson Observations, Individual Teacher Interviews, and Journals

The study began with lesson observations using participant observation as the field technique. The lesson observation times and the post-observation conferences offered me a glimpse of each teacher's life as an English teacher for the particular grade level and their personalities. In the form of field notes, I recorded the data during observations and pre-and post-observation conferences. The 20 hours of lesson observation were very valuable in the sense that I was able to establish a relationship with these teachers. I had the feeling that they were comfortable with me and my presence in their classrooms. While conducting the interviews, I tried my best to follow Spradley's (1979) ethnographic interviewing techniques. One time after I finished interviewing one of my participants, I heard her commenting on the interview process to another teacher, "I didn't feel like I was in an interview. I felt like I was just having a friendly

conversation with her.” I used my research questions as guiding questions, which helped me to hone the conversation to more related issues.

I used both a micro tape recorder and a digital recorder to record the interviews. I found the latter far better than the former in terms of sensitivity and voice quality. I interviewed the teachers wherever they wanted and also offered the room in my studio apartment as a possible venue. The interviews were ultimately conducted in several places such as my room, the Language Laboratory, a teacher’s apartment, the resource room, and even the school hall.

Starting on Monday, September 24, 2007 I visited the first two classes. One of the teachers taught an Opportunity Class (OC) during the 1st hr (9-10 a.m.) and the other taught a sixth grade during the 3rd hr (11:20 a.m.-12:20 p.m.). By October 25 we had finished 20 hours of observation. On October 26, I started observing the second group comprising three teachers. During the first hour, I was in a sixth grade classroom, the 2nd hour in an OC II classroom, and the 3rd hour in a ninth grade classroom. One of things that I did during all the lesson observation process to open up more opportunities for me to participate was to ask the teachers if I could be of any assistance to them. A few of them asked me if I could help them teach a lesson or two.

When I started assisting the teachers, my level of participation increased from that of sitting among the students and/or participating in the classroom conversation and activities, sometimes helping the teacher supervise classroom activities and correct students’ work on her/his request to that of team teaching a poem, or sometimes teaching an entire lesson or two.

December 5-12, the school held the third terminal examination and on December 14, the school had its closing ceremony after which the students can leave for their winter break. The teachers could leave on December 20 after submitting all the exam results and student records and finishing the screening of the students. Not all students can leave for winter break. For example, students in tenth grade and in OC I have a one-month winter class (December 24, 2007-January 24, 2008). The tenth graders have to take their Secondary School Examination, which started on March 1, 2008. For OC I, this was an extra time for them to study in school. Except for tenth grade teachers, the rest of the teachers have the choice of not teaching the winter OC I classes. The headmaster collected a list of teachers who were willing to teach these classes. If he can find enough teachers, he sometimes holds classes for the many other students staying in school (because they do not have a place to go). In other TCV schools, when the school closes for winter break, the schools are left with very few students, but that is not the case in this school.

November is typically a very busy month for the teachers because of two major events: celebration of Children's Day on November 14 and writing the test papers for the third term. I planned on interviewing the first two teachers for whom I finished lesson observations but it did not happen because they did not have time and I didn't push the teachers. So, as the teachers started wrapping up their school work, I started scheduling the interview time and place, and I interviewed the first teacher on December 17 and I finished the fifth teacher on December 30. Except for the first teacher, whose interview took almost two hours, the rest of them finished in about or a little over an hour. I

transcribed the first interview and when I realized that it was going to take very long to transcribe all the other interviews by myself, I asked the teachers if they would be interested in transcribing their own interview and three of them who were still on campus agreed. I told them that I would pay them by the hour commensurate with their salary. They at once said that I did not have to pay them but I explained to them my responsibilities as a researcher and they agreed. There were many other instances in which people tried to be helpful to me and I had to turn down their offers. However, when I explained to them why, they understood, I think. One of my friends said her husband could help me do any typing work that I had. When I explained to her confidentiality ethics and why I could not let him do that she asked me, "Is this rule something every person who works like you obey?" And then in lay terms, I briefly told her about my moral and ethical responsibilities as a researcher and this information appeared to astound her.

After winter break I resumed the study on March 11. In this term, two of the teachers that I was going to observe were teaching English at the same time, during the third hour. I thus split my observation time between the two teachers, which would have required all of April and may be even some of May in order to finish 20 hours of lesson observations. As good luck would have it, the Headmaster happened to adjust one of the teachers' time-table, replacing her third hour English class with eighth grade English during the 4th hour. Therefore I completed the 20 hours between April 3 and 27. I was able to observe all three of the teachers once a day except on Saturday when they did not have classes after the third hour. The remaining two teachers were not participating in the

lesson observation part of the research. From April 28, I started interviewing the teachers and finished on May 6.

I used the remaining weeks of May to transcribe the second set of interviews, which was quite time-consuming. I used the last week of June to review the transcripts and make a hard copy of each teacher's interview transcripts so that I could hand this copy to teachers for them to read and confirm its accuracy. At the end of each transcript, I had the teachers sign it saying that they had confirmed the accuracy of the information printed on the pages they read. I had transcripts ranging from 12 pages to 28 single-spaced pages. In total, I had about 190 single-spaced pages of transcript.

Among the three teachers that I was observing, two were male teachers and both of them are House masters. There were a few times when they had to miss classes because of some work as House masters and they requested me to take over their classes, which I gladly did. However, I did make it clear to all my participants that when I said 20 hours of lesson observations, I would count only those days where both of us were present. Thus, it took a good 6 weeks to get 20 hours of lesson observation for the three teachers. Compared to the first group, the pre- and post-observation conferences with these three teachers were less frequent because my lesson observation schedule (second, third and fourth hours) did not permit it. I avoided using the 15 minute tea break after the 2nd hour, but I did steal some other free time in order to talk to them about their teaching and to address any concerns.

My last official day with the teachers was on June 30. I organized a working dinner with three items on the agenda. First, I wanted to talk about the journal that the

teachers had been writing (at least, I hoped they had). When I sent out the dinner notice, I asked them to bring their journals or a copy of the journal if they wanted to keep the journal. I also told them that they could make copies of only those entries that they were comfortable sharing with me. I had made arrangements with the school librarian so that they could use the copy machine there and bill it to me. Most of them handed me copies of pages from their journals. To my surprise, two teachers did not give me anything. I was a little disappointed. At the end of the data collection time, I asked them to submit whatever they had even if it were one page. Eventually, they handed me a few pages. Therefore, journal writing as a secondary source of data was not very successful for two reasons: (a) some teachers did not write it and (b) among the ones who wrote, only some of them were reflective.

The next thing on agenda was to read the transcripts. I handed each teacher a copy of their transcripts. I asked them to check for content and not for grammar. I felt they were amused as they read the transcripts. I saw some of them reading with smiles on their faces. One of teachers said, "I can't believe I said all these. I feel like keeping a copy for myself." That reminded me of one teacher who asked me if she could get a copy (audio) of her interview. I didn't give her an immediate "no." I paused and then explained to her about the confidentiality and protection of the research data that I had collected. I told her that I had not finished my research and I really could not give her a copy of her taped interview. In fact, I was not even providing them with a hard copy of the transcript. I told her they would get a chance to read and reflect on it and then I would collect it. I thought she understood my situation. Another teacher commenting on her transcript said to me, "I

could still feel and see us talking.” She was the one who said that she did not feel like she was in an interview session. She said, “It didn’t feel like an interview at all. I felt like I was just talking to my friend.” I was very pleased to hear those comments because it was in accord with Spradley’s (1979) depiction of an ethnographic interview as “a series of friendly conversations” (p. 58). However, I must also point out that this participant is my friend!

The last thing on agenda before we started eating was to decide on what kind of compensation (for their time) the teachers would prefer. They all sat together and came up with a list of educational movies and reference books. One of the teachers handed me the handwritten list. I skimmed the list and said, “Now, I am telling you upfront that I can not promise that I can find everything in the list but I’ll try my best.” Then they all said in unison, “Oh, no, no. (meaning we are not saying we want everything in the list) Please, don’t worry if you can’t find it. We totally understand it.” Then I handed the list back and asked them to write a brief note/statement saying that they had discussed this and that everyone was agreement regarding this list. After two days, my friend came to my room with a paper which read:

2nd July, 2008

It has been a privilege for us, ten teachers from TCV School, Suja to participate in Ms. Pema Yangchen’s data collection for her research on the topic: “Teacher Learning in a Tibetan School in Exile: A Community of Practice Perspective” here in our school. We have learnt a lot from her frank and sincere feedbacks given after observing our lessons in different classes and more so from her lesson demonstrations given on different topics. So, we sincerely feel blessed to have her here for some months as our guide, resource person and mentor. As regard to the time compensation that she had promised before the start of the whole programme, we feel that actually we need to compensate for the precious time

that she had spent for us by finding teaching materials, giving us useful feedbacks and giving lesson demonstrations as mentioned above. But, as she has told us that it is required by her research ethics, we have met and decided to request her to provide us with some of the reference books and educational DVDs and CDs that we have mentioned on the next page, if it is possible for her to get them for us. It is a bit embarrassing to ask for all these as she has already given us so much.

Interview Questions

According to Spradley (1979), one can think of ethnographic interviews as “a series of friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants” (p. 58). This technique was helpful in developing rapport and eliciting information. Unlike most forms of interviewing, in ethnographic interviewing, “both questions and answers must be discovered from informants” (Spradley, 1979, p. 84). According to Spradley (1979) one of the strategies for discovering questions is to ask informants to talk about a particular cultural scene. The author calls such questions “descriptive questions” and classifies them into five major types of descriptive questions: grand tour questions, mini tour questions, example questions, experience questions, and native-language questions. This ethnographic interview employed descriptive questions starting with grand tour questions. Before asking the ethnographic questions, the researcher let the informant know the purpose of the interview, explained the project and what it involved. Therefore, the interview started with a greeting, followed by some explanations of the purpose of the interview and some explanations of the study and then slowly proceeded to ethnographic questions. A sample interview can be found in Appendix B.

Data Description, Analysis, and Interpretation

Data was collected in the form of field notes through lessons observations accompanied by pre- and post-lesson observation conferences, individual interviews, and teacher journals. Interviews were transcribed and returned to participants for verification. The data analysis involved three steps--description, analysis, and interpretation (Wolcott, 1994). However, the author emphasized:

By no means do I mean to suggest that the three categories—description, analysis, and interpretation—are mutually exclusive. Nor are lines clearly drawn where description ends and analysis begins, or where analysis becomes interpretation....Researchers seem to follow no consistent pattern employing them. The terms are often combined (e.g., descriptive analysis, interpretive data) or used interchangeably....analysis and interpretation appearing as virtual synonyms.... (p.11)

Following Wolcott's suggestions, the transformation of data collected for this study took place in three stages. First, under descriptive analysis, I presented a descriptive, general analysis of what I understood of the participants' experiences regarding the three concepts I tried to explore in this study. I drew on my field notes, interview transcripts, and journals. The goal was to stay as close to the data as originally recorded (Wolcott, 1994). At the end of this stage, I accumulated large amounts of excerpts from my field notes and participants' words from the interview transcripts so that "the informants themselves seem to tell the stories" (Wolcott, 1994, p. 10) or in other words, let the data "speak for themselves" (Glesne, 1998).

During the second stage, the coding categories were developed based on a literature review of professional development, teacher learning, community of practice and themes emerged from the descriptive analysis of data during the first stage. Four

separate sets of coding categories were developed to analyze and interpret the three crucial concepts explored in this study, namely, professional development, teacher learning and communities of practice. The first and second sets of coding categories provided a description and analysis and of practicing teachers' perceptions of professional development and teacher learning respectively. The third set of coding categories provided a description and analysis of practicing teachers' perceptions of necessary resources and environments for learning. The last set of coding categories described and analyzed teacher learning from a community of practice perspective. The coding categories are presented in table 2 below.

Building on the descriptive analysis of the data, I presented an interpretation of the data by refocusing on the categories. Three core categories emerged: sharing, participation and commitment.

Table 2

Coding System for Teacher Learning

	Coding Categories
Practicing Teachers' Perception of Professional Development	As Random Learning Opportunities One-size-fits-all Top-down Workshops Improving Instructional Practices Learning from Peers <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sharing through mini-workshops• Sharing through grade-level or subject-area groups
Practicing Teachers' Perception of Teacher Learning	Personal Characteristics <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A solid general education background• A deep knowledge of their subject matter• Familiarity with numerous pedagogical approaches• Strong communication skills Personal Actions <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Responsibility for professional learning• Commitment and encouragement• Sharing and collegiality
Practicing Teachers' Perception of Necessary Resources and Environment:	Resources for Teachers <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Educational resources• Peer observation and lesson observation (table continues)

Coding Categories

- Carving time
 - The school principal's role
- Cultivating a Learning Environment
- School/Teaching culture
 - Motivators
 - Obstacles

Communities of Practice:

- Membership
- Tibetans
 - English language teachers
 - Non-native English language teachers
- Purpose
- Sharing challenges
 - Learning together
- Bond
- Passion
 - Commitment
 - Spiritual act
-

CHAPTER 4

THE CONTEXT

Introduction

The context for this study cannot be explained in a few paragraphs. Creswell (2002) urged the author to “place the reader figuratively in the setting” (p. 491). And so to set the context I need to begin by taking the reader five decades back, to the year 1959, the year in which Tibet lost its freedom. Born a decade later in another Buddhist country, Bhutan, I never knew Tibet directly, relying on word of mouth from the elders, my teachers and my readings for my knowledge of that fateful year and the years before or after. Despite the fact that we have been struggling for five decades for our freedom following the non-violent approach of our spiritual and temporal leader, His Holiness the XIVth Dalai Lama, Tibetans in exile and remaining in Tibet have not lost hope for freedom. This determination to continue the struggle for a free Tibet is the context in which the Tibetan community in India must be understood.

Since 1959: Tibetan Diaspora

In the afternoon of April 18, 1959, a month after the failure of the Tibetan National Uprising against the Chinese occupation of Tibet, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, his mother, sister, Ngari Rinpoche and the remaining seventy men of the Tibetan government arrived in Tezpur, India (Avedon, 1984; Dalai Lama, 1991). The Dalai Lama (1962) recounted that day in his book, *My Land and My People*:

And when we came down to the railway at Tezpur, I was astonished and quite overwhelmed to find thousands of telegrams of good wishes and about 100 journalists and photographers, representing newspapers all over the world, who

had come to that remote place to meet me and hear what they called “the story of the year.” (p. 217)

While “the story of the year” was being revealed to the rest of the world, the condition inside Tibet was worsening. Beginning in April, thousands of refugees started fleeing by scaling the Himalayan passes, leading them into the neighboring countries of Bhutan, Nepal, and India. They brought more “news of a wholesale effort on the part of China to uproot Tibetan society and culture” (Avedon, 1984, p. 71). The Dalai Lama learned that the Chinese had bombarded the Norbulingka, the Potala, and the Jokhang and completely destroyed the Chakpori Medical School, slaughtering and wounding thousands (Dalai Lama, 1991). According to a People's Liberation Army document, between March 1959 and September 1960, 87,000 Tibetans were killed in military action excluding those who died out of starvation, torture and suicide (Dalai Lama, 1991). The International Commission of Jurists' inquiry revealed “more horrors than even I had heard of,” the Dalai Lama (1962) wrote and presented a summary of the oppressions the Tibetans had to suffer:

Tens of thousands of our people have been killed, not only in military actions, but individually and deliberately. They have been killed, without trial, on suspicion of opposing communism, or of hoarding money, or simply because of their position, or for no reason at all. But mainly and fundamentally they have been killed because they would not renounce their religion. They have not been shot, but beaten to death, crucified, buried alive, disemboweled, and beheaded. These killings have been done in public. The victims' fellow villagers and friends and neighbors have been made to watch them, and eye witnesses described them to the Commission. Men and women have been slowly killed while their own families were forced to watch, and small children have even been forced to shoot their parents.

Lamas have been specially persecuted. The Chinese said they were unproductive and lived on the money of the people. The Chinese tried to humiliate them, especially the elderly and most respected, before they tortured them, by harnessing them to ploughs, riding them like horses, whipping and

beating them, and other methods too evil to mention. And while they were slowly putting them to death, they taunted them with their religion, calling them to perform miracles to save themselves from pain and death.

Apart from these public killings, great numbers of Tibetans have been imprisoned or rounded up and taken away to unknown destinations, great numbers have died from brutalities and privations of forced labor, and many have committed suicide in despair and misery. When men have been driven to take to the mountains as guerrillas, the women and children left in their villages have been killed with machine guns. (p. 222)

Thousands and thousands of children ranging from breast-feeding babies to fifteen years were separated from their parents; those parents who protested were killed (Dalai Lama, 1962). In a few villages, the Chinese sterilized all men and women (Dalai Lama, 1962). Besides the unspeakable crimes against the monks, the Chinese also destroyed hundreds of monasteries (Dalai Lama, 1962). Having gathered all this evidence, the International Commission charged the Chinese guilty of “the gravest crime of which any person or nation can be accused,” that is of genocide, “the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethical, racial or religious group as such” (Dalai Lama, 1962, p. 223).

In exile, the Dalai Lama (1962) devoted his life to remind the world of “what had happened and is happening in Tibet, to care for the Tibetans who have escaped with me to freedom, and to plan for the future” (p. 224). According to Avedon (1984), by the end of June, 20,000 Tibetans had escaped, eventually totaling 100,000. The author described the perilous escape attempts:

While those closest to the border had been compelled to scale the world’s highest and least frequented passes, others travelling inland from Kham and Amdo, had fought their way free in running battles lasting three and four months. They saw their ranks drastically reduced; a typical group of 125 survivors, who reached Assam in June, reported that they had set out 4,000 strong. Most of the refugees were starving and or wounded, ill from the low altitude and stunned by a profound culture shock on descending to an alien world. (p.72)

Many of those who survived this hazardous trans-Himalayan trek and arrived in India as summer began succumbed to “a deadly tropical stew of viruses and bacteria” (Laird, 2006, p. 341) during the first year, which affected the young and the elderly the most. The Dalai Lama’s immediate task was to save the refugees (Avedon, 1984). The Indian government set up two large transit camps to receive the refugees and later dispersed them for road work to the cooler regions of northern India (Avedon, 1984). All through the summer and autumn of 1959 Tibetan refugees continued to arrive at the two camps (Avedon, 1984). Thousands had already escaped through Bhutan since early spring when Bhutan closed the main passes immediately after the uprising in fear of China’s retribution (Avedon, 1984). According to the author:

Although some 4,000 refugees eventually remained in Bhutan, the rest were forced to beg their way across the country, bartering the few pieces of jewelry, images and *thankas* they possessed, so that, on their egress a month later, most were destitute. (p. 75)

After resettling in Dharamsala, which is now the headquarters of the Tibetan government in exile, the Dalai Lama took his first steps to reconstitute the government in exile and draft the democratic constitution (Avedon, 1984). The most urgent task was the process of rehabilitation of the refugees and by the end of 1960, 666 of them left the camps to make a living in the “uninhabited stretch of jungle situated in gently rolling hills fifty-two miles west of Mysore” in the south Indian state of Karnataka (Avedon, 1984, p. 87). Despite the immense difficulties of clearing the jungles to convert it into a livable place to live and farm, as more and more refugees settled there, the settlement was self-supporting after six years (Avedon, 1984).

By the 1970s, thirty-five Tibetan settlements had been established in India, ten in

Nepal, and seven in Bhutan (Laird, 2006). The Dalai Lama remains ever grateful not only for the government of India's generous humanitarian assistance to enable the Tibetans to resettle and re-establish themselves in India and Bhutan but also to the governments of Great Britain, the United States of America, Australia, New Zealand, South Vietnam, and voluntary relief organizations in many other countries who helped the Tibetan refugees by providing food, money, medicine, clothes, and other support (Dalai Lama, 1962).

MacPherson, Bentz, and Ghoso (2008) explained the exodus of Tibetans refugees into India in terms of three waves:

The first wave occurred between 1959 and the 1970s, when over 80,000 Tibetans followed His Holiness the Dalai Lama into exile....The second wave began in the 1980s and increased steadily up to the mid-1990s. Between 1986 and 1996, the Indian government admitted 25,000 Tibetans. Their departure from Tibet corresponded with a period of increased liberalizations in China, which allowed more monastics to join orders and permitted increased migration. About 44 percent of the people in this second wave of refugees were monks and nuns. Furthermore, there was a dramatic increase in short-term visitors from Tibet. For example, up to 100,000 Tibetans from Tibet attended the Kalachakra ceremony in Sarnath in 1990. Most of these visitors journeyed in part on foot....The third and current wave, if indeed a distinct "wave" at all, is characterized by a decline in the number of visitors and exiles, with a disproportionate number of monks and nuns. In 1998, for example, 2,200 Tibetans arrived in India, most of whom were monks or nuns seeking religious sanctuary and education. (pp. 6-7)

According to the Tibetan Demographic Survey of 1998, approximately 111,170 Tibetans were in exile, the majority of whom lived in India (85,000). Other receiving countries included Nepal (14,000), Bhutan (1,600), Switzerland (1,540), rest of Europe (640), Scandinavia (110), USA and Canada (7,000), Japan (60), Taiwan (1,000), Australia and New Zealand (220) (Planning Council, 2000).

After staying at Birla House on the outskirts of Mussoorie, a city in the north Indian state of Uttarakhand for about a year, on April 29, 1960, the Dalai Lama moved to

Dharamsala, then an abandoned hill station in the northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh (Avedon, 1984). Since then Dharamsala has been the residential town and the headquarters of the Tibetan Government-in-exile, known as the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA). According to the Office of Tibet website, the CTA was built on modern democratic principles and “it administers all matters pertaining to Tibetans in exile, including the re-establishment, preservation and development of Tibetan culture and education, and leads the struggle for the restoration of Tibet’s freedom” (para. 5). Although the government of India welcomed the Dalai Lama and the Tibetans to India, it did not recognize the Tibetan government-in-exile, but Tibetans in India claim their Tibetan citizenship. According to the Office of Tibet website, Tibet’s legal status is “stateless.” To Tibetans, both inside and outside Tibet, the CTA is the legitimate government of Tibet.

The Tibetan government-in-exile functions mainly through the assistance of the government of India, various international voluntary organizations, individual voluntary donations, and contributions from business enterprises from the Tibetans in exile. These humanitarian efforts have helped the Tibetans to resettle and reestablish themselves into homogenous communities to restore and preserve their tradition and culture. For instance, the Office of Tibet stated that there were:

Fourteen major and 8 minor agricultural centres, 21 agro-industrial settlements and 10 handicraft centres throughout India and Nepal. There are also 83 Tibetan schools in India, Nepal and Bhutan with an approximate 23,000 children currently enrolled....More than 117 monasteries have been re-established in exile; also a number of institutions, including the Tibetan Medical and Astrological Institute, the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts, the Centre for Tibetan Arts and Crafts - all based in Dharamsala, the Central Institute for Higher Tibetan Studies in Sarnath and Tibet House in New Delhi.

These institutions help to preserve and promote an ancient heritage and culture facing imminent extinction in its own homeland, whilst enhancing the cultural life of the exile community. (The Office of Tibet, n.d.)

As the Dalai Lama said during the 48th anniversary of the Tibetan Children's Village School, Dharamsala, "Fifty years is long in the life of a person but for a country, it is not" (Phayul, 2008). Within their 50 years of exile, Tibetans have struggled continuously to preserve their culture and language while still urging China to continue its dialogue with Tibet. As called for by the United Nations General Secretary Ban Ki-moon, Tibetans want a dialogue, "in a sincere manner, so all the concerns concerning Tibet will be resolved smoothly and harmoniously" (Phayul, 2008).

Education in Exile

On coming into exile, one of the highest priorities of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the government in-exile was to provide care and education to Tibetan children who survived the perilous escape. Many of the children who survived the escape succumbed to the alien living and climatic conditions and so did many of the older people. As a result, orphaned and destitute children needed urgent care and attention. The Dalai Lama (1962) emphasized the urgency and importance of educating the Tibetan children:

It is even harder for children than for adults to be uprooted and taken suddenly to an entirely different environment. We had to do something drastic to preserve their health and their education was also a matter of great importance. We know that our children in Tibet are being snatched away from their parents and brought up as Chinese Communists, not as Tibetan Buddhists....So, in the next generation, the children in India may be very important people, a nucleus of the peaceful religious life, which we wish to regain. (p. 226)

On March 3, 1960, the Dalai Lama opened the first school in Mussoorie for 50 young men entrusted to Mary and Jigme Taring, who later provided leadership for opening two

more residential schools in Simla and in Darjeeling (Avedon, 1984). Another matter of great concern for the Dalai Lama was the infant population, who suffered immensely due to infections and health problems that left the parents helpless (Dalai Lama, 1962). The Dalai Lama offered to take care of them by opening a nursery in Dharamsala entrusted to his elder sister, Tsering Dolma (Dalai Lama, 1962). Tsering Dolma and other volunteers took care of 800 infants, improvising “the barest necessities of life for this enormous family” (Dalai Lama, 1962, p. 227).

The Dalai Lama then approached the Government of India for separate schools for Tibetan children. In May 1961, the Dalai Lama received the Prime Minister’s support and the Tibetan Schools Society (TSS) was established, which operated as an autonomous body within the Indian Ministry of Education (Avedon, 1984). Despite the difficulties posed by TSS not being a full-fledged education body of the Indian education system, by early 1970s when TSS changed its name to the Central Tibetan Schools Administration (CTSA), it was already taking care of 9,000 children in 32 educational institutions (Avedon, 1984). The author added:

Ten years later, 15,000 studied in fifty-two schools, the majority of whom chose to continue on to a university. Advanced studies in Tibet’s own academic tradition were provided by the Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, founded in January 1968 in Benares, as well as the Buddhist School of Dialectics, begun in Dharamsala five years later. To continue care for orphaned children, a system of Tibetan foster homes was created, beginning in 1962 with the Mussoorie Homes run by Mary Taring. By the end of the decade, with 600 children in twenty-five Tibetan-style households staffed by live-in parents, Mussoorie was outdone by the Nursery in Dharamsala, which changed its name to the Tibetan Children’s Village. Placed under the direction of the Dalai Lama’s younger sister, Pema Gyalpo, it relocated to Egerton Hall above the military cantonment and began rapidly expanding over the hills. At the close of the seventies its city-like campus housing over 1,000 destitute children six months to eighteen years old was

regarded by UN agencies and others as a paradigm for rehabilitating refugee children and was undisputedly the most successful enterprise in exile. (p. 97-98)

In 1960, CTA established the Department of Education (DOE) and made them responsible for the education and welfare of Tibetan refugee children. According to DOE (2008), today there are 82 Tibetan schools (excluding pre-primary schools) in India, Nepal and Bhutan. Based on their source of funding and administrative body, they are grouped into two categories: Central Tibetan Schools Administration (CTSA) and Autonomous Bodies. Regarding the Central Tibetan Schools Administration (CTSA):

There are 28 CTSA schools whose enrolment is currently 9,991 students. Six of these schools (CST Mussoorie; CST Shimla; CST Dalhousie; CST Darjeeling, CST, Mundgod and CST Kalimpong) that in addition to day scholars provide hostel and boarding facilities to a total of about 1,700 students are known as residential schools. The remaining 22 schools that do not have such facilities are known as day schools. All services in the day schools are provided free of cost. The CTSA also provides full school fees for about 360 boarders in the residential schools; school fees for the remaining 1,350 boarders are paid through the DOE. In addition, the CTSA also runs 45 Pre-Primary schools. (Department of Education, n.d., para. 3)

On the other hand, the Autonomous Bodies are described thus:

The 52 schools in this group comprise of 15 schools administered by the Sambhota Tibetan Schools Administration (STSA); 17 schools that are funded and administered by the Tibetan Children's Village (TCV), Dharamsala; 13 schools that are under the Snow Lion Foundation (SLF), Nepal, 2 schools that are funded and administered by the Tibetan Homes Foundation (THF), Mussoorie; and 5 other schools that are managed by other Tibetan charitable organizations. (Department of Education, n.d., para.1)

Curriculum and Language Policy

Tibetan schools follow the curriculum approved by the Board of Education of the host nation. According to Choedon (1999):

Tibetan schools in India are affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), New Delhi, and follow what is called a 10+2 pattern of

education which is being promoted nationwide as the standard form of school education. This pattern has ten years of general education and two years of high school with different streams, after which students can attend institutions of higher education. CBSE is an autonomous body, within the Indian Education System, controlled by the government of India. It functions as an educational standardization board. (Chapter 3)

In other words, Tibetan schools have a centralized curriculum controlled by the CBSE, which in turn is controlled by the government of India. The textbooks based on this curriculum are prepared by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in New Delhi. Tibetan students are required to take three different language classes, following the Indian national policy on education called the Three Language Formula (Choedon, 1999). According to Singha (cited in Choedon, 1999, Chapter 4), the CBSE regulations issued in 1988 required that:

- a. Each student through the high school study and pass competency examinations in three languages;
- b. These three languages are a combination of Hindi, English, and any one of the 15 languages mentioned in the VIII Schedule of the Indian Constitution (Singha, 1991). Tibetan schools are, however, allowed to replace one of the three languages with Tibetan. (Singha, 1991)

Although the DOE prepared the textbooks for Tibetan language, it did not have full authority over the content of the Tibetan textbooks for grades nine to twelve (Council for Tibetan Education, 1985). According to the Council, the committee that controlled that decision had only two Tibetan members.

Tibetan schools in exile have been following such a curriculum out of necessity. As refugees they neither had the finances nor the leverage to build a curriculum for the education of the Tibetan children in exile. One obvious problem with implementing such a uniform curriculum is that it will not meet the needs of the Tibetan children who are

linguistically and culturally different from the Indians. The Indian school curriculum is meant for Indian students. If the “purpose of education is to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are considered crucial for the wholesome growth of children within a specific cultural setting” (Phuntsog, 1998), then there must be a close relationship between culture and curriculum. Lawton (1975) also emphasized this close link and added, “curriculum is essentially a selection from the culture of a society” (p. 6). However, the Indian curriculum is lacking in this respect when implemented in Tibetan schools.

A school curriculum based on the perspectives of the dominant culture excludes or isolates the perspectives and more importantly, the culture of the minority group. The underlying message of such a curriculum is that the traditional values, cultures, language, religions, histories, arts, music and knowledge of the minorities are inferior to those of the dominant group (Kame'eleihiwa, 1992). Tibetan students are affected considerably by this curriculum, in terms of alienation from their home culture. Home culture has been believed to provide a strong foundation for developing positive self-concept (Phuntsog, 1998), greatly improving learning (Jordan, 1985), and enhancing comprehension and critical thinking skills in reading instruction (Mason & Au, 1990). In short, the integration of native language and culture are considered as strong predictors of academic success (Cummins, 1986).

Over the years, Tibetan schools have gained some autonomy in designing school curriculum. For example, in the late 1980s the Tibetan Department of Education (DOE) invited Samdhong Rinpoche, the most popular Tibetan scholar and academician, to draft

a plan to revise the present education system for Tibetans in India (Rinpoche, 1985). In his paper entitled, "Suggested reforms in the Tibetan education system," one of the primary recommendations was the change of language of instruction in Tibetan schools in India from English to Tibetan. According to Rinpoche, this change would help remedy the decline of educational standards in Tibetan schools. Beginning in 1994, the Tibetan language became the medium/language of instruction at the primary level (grades 1-5) (Rikha, 2000). This switch not only required preparing textbooks for science, social studies and mathematics in Tibetan but also educating primary teachers to attain proficiency in teaching in the Tibetan medium (Rikha, 2000).

According to Choedon (1999), Tibetan schools have full authority over graduation requirements for grades K-9, although not over school curriculum. However, at high school, as for all Indian students attending CBSE-affiliated schools, Tibetan students also are required to take the CBSE-designed examinations at the end of the tenth and twelfth grades to get promoted to 11th grade and to gain entrance to Indian colleges. In these nation-wide examinations, Tibetan language competency is not required, while English language competency is necessary.

On the surface, the three-language policy appears to be a neutral policy which seems to respect the language of the minority groups and the regional languages because India is a multilingual country. Yet, when it comes to access to higher education, home languages other than English and Hindi are disadvantaged, unless the speakers can afford private lessons in one or both of the privileged languages. Although the three-language formula sounds fine in theory, in reality its implementation creates a barrier for linguistic

minority groups to advance to higher education. Even within the Indian community, back in the 1960s a bitter conflict arose concerning the status of various languages in India, especially from the southern states, where Hindi is not widely spoken. They opposed the use of Hindi in the government services, or as the official language, stating that it would disadvantage them for employment in those areas. They also argued that it was unfair for them to be required to learn both Hindi and English, whereas native speakers of Hindi would only have to learn English.

These conflicts eventually led to the formulation of the Three Language Formula, which is supposed to balance the educational load, be more just, promote national integration, and provide wider language choice in the school curriculum (Srivastava, 1990). According to the formula, people from non-Hindi areas study their regional language, Hindi, and English. Hindi speakers, on the other hand, study Hindi, English and another language. A closer look at this language policy will reveal that it still favors the Hindi speakers and the non-Hindi speakers do not have a language choice. The only language choice non-Hindi speakers have is to drop their mother tongue and learn another language. On the other hand, the Hindi speakers have a choice of learning another language without abandoning their mother tongue. This language policy has not only created a linguistic barrier for Tibetan students, but also for the Indians whose mother tongue is not Hindi. Consequently, this results in limited access to higher education and better paid jobs.

Basic Education Policy (BEP) for Tibetans in Exile (2005)

After fifty years of implementing a modern education system in the Tibetan schools in exile, Tibetans have been unable to produce any scholar either in modern or traditional subjects (Rinpoche, n.d.). The Prime Minister of Tibetan government-in-exile, Venerable Samdong Rinpoche, talked about how the present education system is inadequate and counter-productive to the vision and mission of the Tibetans and hence emphasized the need for an education policy that will meet the needs of the younger generation of Tibetans. In his welcome speech to eminent scholars who gathered to offer their guidance and suggestions on the third draft of the BEP, Rinpoche commented about the draft:

Someone might accuse us by saying that this draft is overloaded with tradition--and it may appear so on the surface. But we would really like to explain that we really need modern knowledge: we need excellent scientists, engineers, technocrats, medical personnel and so on. But we need such outstanding educated people to be well grounded in tradition for a simple reason, as explained by His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama: "This much is evident, that if someone strives to seek peace, justice and order in the world and has to attain lasting happiness and true freedom, he or she will have to seek solace in tradition--tradition in the widest sense. In its true sense tradition is neither old nor new, neither modern nor anti-modern. It is eternal, universal and sacred." (para. 10)

In 2005, after several working drafts and revisions, the Basic Education Policy for Tibetans in Exile was finally drafted to be implemented in all Tibetan schools in exile. In its introductory chapter it stated:

Article 17 (2) of the Charter of Tibetans in Exile, under *Directive Principles* states: "*Towards enhancing the imparting of education, an ideal education policy meeting the real basic needs of Tibet shall be formulated.*" As no such policy has yet been formulated, it is felt that the time is ripe to review the current situation of education of Tibetans in exile and to resolve upon a basic education policy that is better suited to the current needs of the Tibetans in exile and that may serve as a

basis for the education policy of Tibet in future when a self-governing status is attained for the whole of the three *Cholkhas* of Tibet. (p. 1)

Therefore, a system of education was drafted with the foundations of traditional Tibetan education as its core, complemented by modern education. One of major changes that the BEP would eventually bring relates to the medium of instruction in all the Tibetan School in-exile.

In an education system having traditional education as its core, it is appropriate to have the medium in which the traditional learning abides as the medium of instruction for general education. Hence, efforts shall be made to gradually convert the medium of instruction in all Tibetan institutions of learning from the pre-primary level up to the highest research study level, into Tibetan language. (p. 5)

Another change to be implemented came in relation to the studying of languages:

A three-language policy shall be adopted. Besides the primary mother-tongue language, a student should be fully proficient in any one foreign language and acquire a working knowledge of reading and writing in a third language after graduating from Class X. A second language may be chosen from among the four languages of Hindi, Chinese, English and Spanish. Depending on the availability of facilities more choices may be given. However, until such time when the medium of instruction is fully converted to the mother tongue, English will remain by necessity the second language. Hence the above stated choice of the second language cannot be implemented immediately, but such a long-term aim should be established now. The third language will be the language of the region where the school is located. If the regional language is Tibetan or the second language, any other essential language may be chosen in their place. From the pre-primary level and up to Class III, no other language besides Tibetan shall be taught.... The teaching of second and third languages shall be started from Class IV and Class VI respectively. (p. 7)

The successful implementation of this education policy is yet to be seen. However, being able to formulate an education policy based on the needs of the younger generations of Tibetans is a huge step in the history of Tibetan education in exile. Up to this point, by necessity, it has been following the footsteps of the education system of India, which in

turn is influenced by the educational policy of colonial Britain. The goal of imposing Britain's education policy in India is captured as early as 1835 in Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay's (n. d.) famous/infamous quote:

We must do our best to form a class of persons who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, words and intellect.

Tibetan Children's Village

This study took place in an autonomous school funded and administered by the Tibetan Children's Village (TCV). TCV is an integrated charitable organization working for the care and education of Tibetan refugee children in India under the leadership of the Dalai Lama's younger sister, Jetsun Pema. The history of TCV goes back to 1960 when 51 ill and malnourished children of Tibetans working as road laborers in Jammu arrived in Dharamsala, the residential town of the Dalai Lama in the northern state of Himachal Pradesh. At this critical moment, Mrs. Tsering Dolma Takla (the elder sister of the Dalai Lama) volunteered to take care of these children. With the Government of India's generous assistance, the Nursery for Tibetan Refugee Children started and provided basic care for children. These children were then sent to some residential schools established by the Government of India which eventually faced overcrowding. By then under the Directorship of Mrs. Jetsun Pema, plans were made to expand the nursery. After a decade of hard work which included seeking financial assistance from private donors and international organizations and pooling the resources to build classrooms and houses, the nursery gradually bloomed into a small village consisting of schools and homes for Tibetan refugee children in exile.

Today, TCV takes care and oversees 9 children's villages and residential schools, 2 day schools and creches, 4 vocational training centers, and 4 youth hostels. The mission of TCV is:

To ensure that all Tibetan children under its care receive a sound education, a firm cultural identity and become self-reliant and contributing members of the Tibetan community and the world at large and it adheres to the following goals: (a) provide parental care and love, (b) develop a sound understanding of Tibetan identity and culture, (c) develop character and moral values, (d) provide effective modern and Tibetan education, (e) provide child-centered learning atmosphere in the schools, (f) provide environment for physical and intellectual growth, and (g) provide suitable and effective life and career guidance for social and citizenship skills.

According to the TCV College brochure, during the last 47 years, TCV has taken care of 34,580 children, giving them the opportunity of attending pre-school through grade XII and having access to other related educational services. Over 1,000 Tibetan students graduate annually from TCV school along with other Tibetan school in India and seek admission into the highly competitive Indian Colleges and Universities. Many of the college graduates return to serve the Tibetan communities in various capacities.

My educational journey. When China annexed my country, Tibet, in the year 1959, my parents along with thousands of other Tibetans fled south to the neighboring country of Bhutan. Resettling in a foreign country as refugees is the hardest thing that the Tibetans have to endure even to this day. To live the life of a refugee is to struggle daily to survive and to preserve and maintain one's culture and language. Living constantly with fear, uncertainties and discrimination, my parents and uncle earned their living by working as underpaid laborers building roads and bridges in Bhutan, as did most of the Tibetan refugees who fled to India and Nepal.

My formal schooling began in a Bhutanese primary school in Thimphu, the capital city of Bhutan. I had the opportunity to learn Bhutanese and English as two of the languages that are taught to every Bhutanese student. English was also the medium of instruction. Though I spoke Tibetan at home as my native language, my formal Tibetan language instruction consisted of an after-school program with a Tibetan teacher who taught Tibetan reading and writing to the children in the same neighborhood.

Growing up, I learned that education is not a fundamental right of Tibetan refugee children, especially not for a girl child. Tibetan parents believe that a woman's place is in the kitchen and that schooling is useless for women. As many of my girl friends quit school to get married in their middle teens, my passion for education grew stronger and stronger. Living with my uncle's family as a young teenager required heavy responsibilities of running all the household chores and baby sitting his infants. Life took a turn for the worse in the early 1980s. Due to some unfortunate events that shook the Tibetan community, Tibetans expressed a desire to resettle in India. Soon after, the Bhutanese government issued an order that required all Tibetan refugees in Bhutan to close down their businesses. As a result my uncle had to close the little shop we owned and move from the city to our farm house and get ready to be resettled in India. Two groups of Tibetans did resettle in India but the third group to which our family belonged never had a chance to resettle in India. My uncle and many other Tibetans still live in Bhutan despite limited freedom.

As a result of this unrest, my sister and I had to quit the Bhutanese city school and join the one-room school for Tibetan children living in the neighboring villages, which

was a half-hour walk through the forest from my village. For a student to have a notebook and a pencil would be a luxury, as would be a blackboard and chalk for the only teacher. We lived with limited food supply. My days were filled with never-ending chores and a day at school was a holiday for me. My sister and I had to take turns to go to school as one had to stay home to work and baby-sit. At school, I spent most of my time teaching the younger children what I had learned in my city school. I enjoyed being at school. Perhaps my love for schooling grew as a result of the heavy responsibilities that I had to shoulder if I were to stay home. As I grew older, I began to realize that only education could lead me to a different life.

For my sister and me, being orphaned at such a young age was like a blessing in disguise. Worried about the future of our lives in the village, our uncle took us to India to seek admission to one of the Tibetan schools that cared for destitute and deprived Tibetan orphans. Thus, this residential school (Tibetan Children's Village) became our home. Without this school, I wouldn't be the person I am now and the person I hope to become. My sister and I received a life-changing education, and above all learned lifelong lessons of what service to others means. Our school's motto, "Others before self," clearly reflects the work these schools do in caring for and educating poor and needy Tibetan children.

Even after my sister and I were under the care of TCV school, at several points during my schooling years, my uncle told me to quit school and help him at home. He would tell me that I had enough education. The only way to convince him otherwise was by doing very well at school, which both my sister and I did. It was a constant struggle

but good grades paid us abundantly. We were able to successfully complete high school and secure funding for college.

Today, my sister is a competent and compassionate registered nurse who served in the health center of two TCV schools taking care of children's health and hygiene. I got my B. A. in English literature in 1993. At that point TCV schools were facing teacher shortage problems and I was asked to teach English in one of the TCV schools. I took this as an opportunity to give back something to my school. I chose to teach in a school where all the students were young adults who had fled from Tibet recently. I had students who had never been to school. These students had to travel day and night through the snow leaving their parents behind, perhaps forever. Listening to their stories and being with these students made me realize that I was in the right place. To help these students better, I decided to join a teacher education college. I got my B. Ed. in teaching English in 1996. In the years that followed, I served as the head of the arts department, which involved organizing meetings, producing English plays, publishing the English magazine, and organizing literary activities. I also served as a member of the school's discipline committee, and a volunteer for the environment club.

I continued to teach in this school until 2001 when I was selected as one of the Fulbright candidates to study in the US for a year. I received funding support from the Graduate College, University of Northern Iowa to complete my M. A. in TESOL and my Ed. D. in curriculum and instruction. With my education here in the US, I know that I will be able to serve the Tibetan teachers and students better. Education has enriched my

life. I believe that by sharing with my fellow teachers the knowledge and skills that I have gained, I can help them to be better and caring teachers.

I want to serve the Tibetan community by promoting professional development for teachers. My own vision is to establish a community of Tibetan teachers from all disciplines to provide a platform for teachers to engage in cross-school collaboration, build confidence in themselves as autonomous professionals, and share and discuss reflections on teaching and learning with others, thus enhancing professional growth. My current research work focuses on teacher learning. To collect data for my research, I returned last September to the Tibetan school where I worked before coming to the US for my graduate studies. During my 10-month stay in the school, I was not only collecting data for my research but I was able to create awareness among teachers about educational research, especially teacher research. I was able to inspire teachers, especially female teachers with my leadership in conducting the research and also in organizing and leading professional development workshops for teachers that they found very effective. In support of the above statements, I would like to share a portion of an email I received from a teacher and a good old friend:

I know that your time is here is very important for you as you are at the last stage of achieving something that we couldn't do. I am really very proud of you not only because of your education but more so for your commitment and dedication to our society and the nation. Very few people are like you when the grass is greener at one's own side. I'm not flattering you and it comes from my heart. After working in this institution, I have come to identify and value people like you. You are a role model to me personally and I'm really blessed to have not only known you but share your friendship.

Getting education in TCV has been the most rewarding experience for me and my sister as orphans. We received a life-changing education, and above all learned lifelong lessons of what service to other means. After I graduate, I will return to India to serve the

Tibetan community. My education here in the US has provided me with a range of skills and expanded knowledge base not only to serve as an effective educational leader but also to encourage collaborative leadership. I am looking forward to my job that will involve educating the future teachers. I'm honored to have this opportunity to give back something to my community. Under my teaching and leadership, I am positive that I will be able to develop many future teachers and teacher leaders who will in turn do the same.

A Day at a Tibetan School

At 6:00 a.m., the school bell rings summoning students for the daily morning prayer. The students scoot down to the school hall groomed and dressed neatly in their school uniforms. Soon after, the hall reverberates with the sound of the students chanting in unison. Listening to this sound from a distance from my staff quarter still not ready to get up was like a soothing music for which I knew the lyrics. I am tempted to hum along but I wouldn't dare to for it is a prayer. It would be an act of disrespect and a culturally inappropriate behavior. On the wooden flooring covered with a long mat which barely serves as a cushion, students sit crossed-legged one behind another. Each and every student except for those seated on the four sides, is squished from all four sides to accommodate all the students. The student population escalates every year with the school's all-year-long open admission policy in an effort to accommodate the Tibetan youngsters arriving from Tibet. This Tibetan school has the largest number of students who are all recent arrivals from Tibet and this makes it unique among the Tibetan schools in India. However, this uniqueness poses challenges for the school, especially for the teachers. For these students, the arduous and dangerous journey from their home town in

Tibet and eventually to this school is not only physically excruciating but emotionally and mentally painful as they risk their lives and flee to India, leaving their parents and relatives behind not knowing when they will meet again. Most of them have crossed the Himalayan mountain passes largely on foot and some have frost-bitten toes or bad injuries. That is the obvious physical injury. Putting their lives at risk to get some education in India under the auspices of a Tibetan school was worth struggling for. For many of them school is a luxury rather than a basic right.

The morning prayer begins with a vigorous recitation of a common mantra invoking the Manjushri, a Bodhisattva who represents wisdom, “OM AH RA PHA TZA NA DHIH. One could repeat the last syllable ‘DHIH’ as long as one could hold one’s breath. This is followed by a verse, which translated from Tibetan to English reads:

Oh compassionate Manjushri, I ask that you dispel the darkness of my ignorant mind with the radiant light of your wisdom so that I may fully realize the meaning of all the Buddha's teachings. I ask for your courage and insight so that I too may perceive directly the nature of reality. (Manjushri Institute, n.d.)

After an hour-long recitation of various prayers from the school’s prayer book and mostly by heart the prayer session comes to an end with several verses of dedication. When the dedication prayers start, all bring their palms together in front of their chests and bow their heads and chant slowly. The last verse is the Long-Life Prayer for His Holiness the XIVth Dalai Lama:

In the snowy mountain paradise
You’re the source of good and happiness.
Powerful Tenzin Gyatso, Chenrezig,
May you stay until samsara ends.

While the rest of the students are chanting in the hall, a few students from each dormitory go to assist the cooks in the common kitchen. Some do the dishes, clean the dormitory and surrounding areas. Some students have the responsibility of cleaning the classrooms. Every thing is done manually and in rotation.

At 7:00 a.m., the bell rings again hurrying all the students to their respective classrooms for the morning self-study period. Each week three teachers supervise this session for attendance and even check each classroom for cleanliness and discipline. The teachers do this in rotation. A few minutes before 8:30 a.m., the classrooms start getting noisier until at 8:30 the bell rings and it turns into a noisy crowd. The teachers start gathering at their regular spots exchanging a few greetings. They all look so fresh and vibrant. The female teachers wear full-length traditional Tibetan dresses with matching blouses and sweaters or jackets. The married female teachers wear a rectangular multi-colored apron that is tied around the waist and falls just beneath the knee. The male teachers' attire consists of trousers, shirts, jackets and a few wear ties. Every teacher carries a bag full of books which mostly consist of notebooks that they took home for correction work. Some come carrying an armful of students' notebooks.

At 8:45 a.m., the bell rings again summoning everyone for the morning assembly. After five minutes, the basket ball ground fills up with closely packed students standing in straight lines in their respective class group. The teachers stand at the back and on the sides as if guarding the students. Another prayer begins commonly known as "the school prayer," composed by Acharya Vajrayudha, paying homage to Lord Mañjughosha. The praise entitled "Glorious Wisdom's Excellent Qualities" was translated by Ngok Lotsawa.

Your wisdom is brilliant and pure like the sun, free from the clouds of the two obscurations.

You perceive the whole of reality, exactly as it is, and so you hold the book of Transcendental Wisdom at your heart.

You look upon all beings imprisoned within samsara, enshrouded by the thick darkness of ignorance and tormented by suffering,

With the love of a mother for her only child. Your enlightened speech, endowed with sixty melodious tones,

Like the thundering roar of a dragon, awakens us from the sleep of destructive emotions and frees us from the chains of karma.

Dispelling the darkness of ignorance, you wield the sword of wisdom ready to cut through all our suffering.

Pure from the very beginning, you have reached the end of the ten bhūmis and perfected all enlightened qualities. Foremost of the Buddha's heirs,

You are adorned with the hundred and twelve marks of a buddha.

To Mañjuśhośa, the "Gentle-voiced," I prostrate, and pray: dispel the darkness from my mind! (Lotsawa House, n.d.)

Reciting this praise everyday helps to "gradually purify their obscurations and come to possess immeasurable positive qualities, such as the ability to retain whatever teachings they have heard, courageous eloquence, unfailing memory, and the power and strength of wisdom that vanquishes all opponents" (Lotsawa House, n.d.). This prayer is followed by the singing of the Tibetan national Anthem composed by the XIVth Dalai Lama's tutor, Trijang Rinpoche.

The source of temporal and spiritual wealth of joy and boundless benefits

The Wish-fulfilling Jewel of the Buddha's Teaching, blazes forth radiant light

The all-protecting Patron of the Doctrine and of all sentient beings

By his actions stretches forth his influence like an ocean.

By his eternal Vajra-nature

His compassion and loving care extend to beings everywhere.

May the celestially appointed Government of Gawa Gyaden achieve the heights of glory

And increase its fourfold influence and prosperity.

May a golden age of joy and happiness spread once more through these regions of Tibet.

And may its temporal and spiritual splendour shine again.

May the Buddha's Teaching spread in all the ten directions and lead all beings in the universe to glorious peace.

May the spiritual Sun of the Tibetan faith and People
Emitting countless rays of auspicious light
Victoriously dispel the strife of darkness. (The Office of Tibet, n.d.)

The Physical education teacher then instructs the students to stand at ease for any announcements from the Headmaster and any activity that is scheduled for that day. For example, Mondays are for class presentation and Thursdays for teacher presentation. The presentations are supposed to last 15 minutes after which the students walk in line to their respective classes. At 9:00 a.m., the peon rings the bell once to mark the beginning of the first hour, which they call the first period. The last period bell goes at 4:00 p.m. The school day is divided into 6 periods with a 20-minute break and an hour lunch break in between. Majority of the teachers assigned to the first hour hurry to their respective classes while the rest head to the teacher's break room. On an average, each teacher has about four to five hours of classes every day. During the break, teachers gather in the break room for tea and the students get some snacks from the kitchen.

The teachers' break room consists of one room to accommodate almost 70 teachers. Many teachers sit outside. During this time the teachers busy themselves with a variety of activities while sipping tea or hot water: reading newspapers, correcting students' books, visiting, discussing, sharing and helping each other. The break time goes in a flash and the teachers once again scoot down the stairs to teach the next one or two classes.

At 1:20 p.m., the school dismisses for lunch. The students go to their respective dormitories. The few students from each dormitory responsible for fetching food from the kitchen serve the meal while the rest sit in a circle. After everyone has been served, they

all raise their plates, say the grace, and eat. After that they clean up and head to their respective classrooms. Most of the teachers lunch in the staff mess by paying a monthly allowance to the office for this facility which saves time and affords them an opportunity to talk with their colleagues during or after lunch over a cup of tea at the nearby Indian tea-stall.

The two afternoon classes are 10 minutes shorter than the earlier ones. At 4:00 p.m., the classes are dismissed for the day. The students drink their afternoon tea and busy themselves in such activities as doing personal home-work or volunteering in humane work such as caring for the sick and wounded dogs on campus and neighboring villages. Majority of the students are busy in participating and practicing for some House activities. For example in June they prepare for the Inter-House Cultural Contest, which is the highlight of the Dalai Lama's birthday celebration in the school. While most of the teachers retire to their staff quarters, for teachers who have been designated as House masters, the work day continues for another 2 hours and sometimes more.

At 6:00 p.m., students eat dinner and head to the classroom for the evening-study, which begins at 7:00 p.m. under the supervision of three teachers. When the evening-study finishes at 8:30 p.m., they gather in the school hall for the evening prayer, which lasts for an hour. By 10:00 p.m., the students are required to switch off the lights and go to bed. There is a group of staff members, known as the School's Discipline Committee, who monitor this. The school campus is dark and quiet until 5:00 a.m. when it is time again to rise and shine. Some students rise up as early as 4:00 a.m. and stand or walk beside a lamp to read.

CHAPTER 5

DESCRIPTION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

Overview

The purpose of this study was two-fold: (a) to describe practicing teachers' perception of professional development and teacher learning, and (b) to examine teacher learning from a community of practice perspective. I planned to explore a small community of English language teachers in a rural Tibetan school in India to provide an understanding of the culture of teacher learning among English language teachers. From a community of practice perspective teachers were studied in terms of what they practiced, what challenges they faced and how they interacted and learned from and with each other. The data were collected primarily using ethnographic interviewing techniques (Spradley, 1979) supplemented by field notes from participant observations (Spradley, 1980), and teacher journals. Eight female and two male teachers who taught English participated in the study.

Research Questions

Drawing on literature and research on the professional development of practicing teachers, on teacher learning, and communities of practice, the following research questions guided the study:

1. What professional development experiences do teachers perceive as most helpful in promoting teacher learning?
2. What are some of the major constraints to professional development and teacher learning as perceived by teachers?

3. What are characteristics of a professionally developing/learning teacher as perceived by the teachers?
4. How and what are teachers learning from and with one another?
5. What motivates teachers to learn?

Description and Analysis

To describe and analyze the data collected for this study, I developed some coding categories based on a literature review of professional development, teacher learning, community of practice and themes that emerged from the initial analysis of data. The coding categories provided a means of organizing the data. The coding categories represent my “impressionistic understanding of what is being described in the experiences, spoken words, actions, interactions, problems and issues expressed by the participants” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 51).

Coding Categories

Four separate sets of coding categories were developed to describe and analyze the three crucial concepts explored in this study: professional development, teacher learning and communities of practice. The first and second sets of coding categories provided a description and analysis of practicing teachers’ perception of professional development and teacher learning respectively. The third set of coding categories provided a description and analysis of practicing teachers’ perception of necessary resources and environment. The last set of coding categories described and analyzed teacher learning from a community of practice perspective. These coding categories summarize the major themes of the study.

Practicing Teachers' Perception of Professional Development

Under four major categories, I represent my understanding of the participating teachers' perception of professional development supported by teachers' words taken from the interview transcripts and my field notes from lesson observations, which included pre- and post-lesson observation conversations. Whenever necessary, sub-categories were also developed.

To most teachers, the terms "professional development" and "workshop" were more or less synonymous. When I asked them if they had had any chances to attend any professional development programs, some of their responses were:

Participant 8: "Like workshops? I have been to two workshops."

Participant 3: "Workshop. Here we had a workshop by X.... I don't remember other workshops."

Participant 2: "Uh...well, a couple of years ago, I got a chance to attend workshop."

One participant's response captured the design and delivery of most of these workshops:

Participant 10: "Teacher teaching and we listening?" For the 10 participants, professional development opportunities mostly consisted of workshops in and outside of school presented by resource persons from abroad such as England and Australia.

Professional Development as Random Learning Opportunities

The school's calendar of events didn't list any professional development activities or programs for teachers. The teachers didn't have any information on what professional development opportunities were available during the year. One participant noted:

It is just random...usually we have one orientation at the beginning. Sometimes, it's helpful like last year when we had some resource people coming here and talking about specific areas. I think the year before that was not at all that useful. I think it was more or less wastage of time because it was like usual meeting when

the teachers were discussing about few things and most of the time gossiping. So last year's orientation was good. And sometimes, we also have chances to attend workshops. Some of the workshops are very helpful like a few years ago, our school organized from a person called Sir X.

Professional development opportunities were rare and even rarer to novice teachers because these opportunities were awarded based on meritocracy and seniority. This was clear from the responses of the participants when they talked about the professional development opportunities that they had experienced over the years. For instance, for participants who had been in the profession for less than 5 years their professional development opportunities were from none to two whereas those who had been in the profession for more than 5 years had at least two opportunities.

One participant made the case for why novice teachers are in more need of those professional development opportunities. According to this participant, there is definitely a need for more professional development programs because of the entry of more teachers from the new generation. In order to prepare these younger generation teachers to become "long-term teachers," they need "professional guidance and experience." The participant said that professional development opportunities are even more necessary for this group of teachers so that they don't lose interest in teaching. To participant 3, "most workshops are on Math and Social Science. It is quite rare on English....we also need more workshops...on teaching English."

Professional Development: One-size-fits-all Top-down Workshops

To add to the problem of rarity of professional development programs, the design, delivery and content of most of the professional development programs the teachers experienced were not context-friendly. According to participant 10, most of the teachers

found that the workshops they attended were not relevant. Participant 4 had similar thoughts and she added, “Resource people have different ideas and we have different needs here and their ideas do not fit into our needs here.” In participant 2’s view, “their way of bringing up children and ours is totally different” and it didn’t “suit” the school environment.

The professional development opportunities were not based on careful assessment of needs of teachers and students and the local context. Participant 1 explained the current state of professional development based on what she heard from her colleagues since she didn’t get any such opportunities so far:

So, professional development is something that the administration should always think about but I feel myself as a teacher that in our ABC schools, they used to conduct lots of workshops and many of the workshops, the resource person...they are organized from abroad universities and from country X or some other...from abroad. I felt that this kind of workshop...when I listen to other people, it doesn’t seem to be that much effective and useful. When I have a casual conversation with my colleagues, though, I’ve never attended any workshops in my teaching career but according to their feeling and experiences, it seems to be not useful. The resource person from abroad...they don’t have knowledge about Indian education system...the education system we have here. If a resource person can understand our education system, the facilities available here and the class strength and by knowing all these ground level, then if the resource person can give some ideas and workshops, I think that will become much more effective because these ideas...if these ideas are applicable in our day-to-day work, then I think that would be very useful. Otherwise, the people...the lecturer...the professor from abroad who do not have any knowledge about our society...the way of teaching, the system, the facilities, the students, the students motivation to learn and all of these things...if they don’t have such idea and if they give workshop with the idea of their own knowledge about the facilities and the standard of the students in country Y...this kind of workshop has always proved not that much effective and appropriate. So, I feel DEF as an institution can, you know, organize and arrange the people, or the lecturer or the professor who has got the knowledge about our problem, our system here. Then if they can give ideas, the ideas are very useful and applicable. I think that kind of workshop would be very helpful for the teacher development and to make the learning happen effectively in the classroom for the students to learn.

Participant 6 disliked the rigidity of the formal workshops and preferred a more informal setting, which he thought would greatly enhance learning. He gave an example:

Nowadays, teacher development activity organized by the education office...that is very formal...in a formal way they are doing. Now with such kind of program, they can see only one face...visiting the only formal place not the informal. Actually what I prefer is a student or a teacher can learn maximum in an informal way. For example, the same two teachers teaching same subject will sit in an informal way with the students with two different teachers and then share and then two things are going to come across. So, through informal way, we can learn many more things than formal way. In an informal way, we can create, we can make it, and we can see the truth.

Not every school is the same and neither are the students nor, more importantly, the teachers. These teachers expressed a desire for professional development for teacher learning that is: (a) available on an ongoing basis not only to experienced teachers but also to novice teachers, (b) tailored to the unique needs and challenges of teachers and the local context, and (c) less formal in setting which will maximize learning and enhance creativity.

Professional Development for Improving Instructional Practices

Bredeson (2003) pointed out that “the primary purpose of professional development for teachers and principals is to improve their practice” (p. 36), a point with which the majority of the participants in this study agreed. Nine of the 10 participating teachers said they had a preference for professional development programs that were “directly related” to their everyday teaching. For instance, for participant 8, a professional development program focusing on teaching poetry would be beneficial for her as she was not satisfied with her poetry teaching method. One of the reasons why she liked the workshop by the Indian resource person was that it was on “teaching English.”

Participant 3 had similar thoughts about the Indian resource person and she added, “more workshop is good because these days methods change.”

According to participant 2, teachers in her school preferred professional development activities that will help them in teaching speaking and writing. The two in-school professional development workshops that she had a chance to attend were viewed as useful and relevant. She preferred professional development programs that are more practical than theoretical, for instance, lesson demonstrations where the resource person introduced language teaching strategies by actually teaching in a real class and where the teachers got to observe it were more beneficial for her than just listening to an expert far away from the local context.

Participant 5 thought that many teachers preferred in-school professional development experiences such as “a practical teaching” also known among the teachers as “lesson demonstrations.” She cited another such experience they had in the past that was done by an Indian resource person as a good learning experience for her. She added, “By observing his teaching, we learned new ideas and techniques to handle the class and to impart the lesson.” She believed that most of the teachers preferred “practical teaching” rather than attending professional development programs somewhere. Some teachers believed that the workshops they attended were not relevant to their students’ knowledge level or sometimes they didn’t learn anything new. So, for them “practical teaching” was the best way to learn as teachers. In-school professional development experiences gave teachers the chance to communicate with the resource person so that the professional development experiences were built on the needs of the teachers.

Based on the one professional development opportunity that participant 7 had, he thought it was “very fruitful and productive.” The tips on teaching that he learned were “very helpful.” For example, “they gave valuable tips on how to initiate your topic, something that I haven’t done it earlier and how you should use your blackboard properly.” As for participant 5, she said she got lots of chances to attend professional development programs. Comparing the number of chances she got to other teachers, it might look like she had plenty of chances for professional development. However, she needed to consider the number of years (10+) she has worked also. She described some of her learning experiences: “I learned a number of teaching methods like bubble sentence. So we use that method in our school very often....I got lots of ideas in making charts....I acquired a number of methods and activities to help the environment.”

Majority of the teachers talked about one particular in-school professional development workshop that they liked in particular, given by an Indian educator. One participant described her experience:

It was very helpful and I had a chance to visit his classes. He took up classes and I learned a lot of things from him. At other times, we get chances to attend workshops, but they were not very much related to the things that we do here at the school. So they were not helpful.

For her, that professional development experience was the best because teachers were able to ask him about their doubts. She added further:

Because his workshop was what we needed here. It was according to the need of the students as well as the teachers. So teachers had also learnt how to use interactive English or Child Centered Method of teaching. Not just reading and writing. Yeah, developing the whole skills of language...four skills of a language. On these we got many ideas from him and we also learned how to use different activities to develop different skills from him. So I feel that was the best that I could attend.

Another participant described it as “very active” and she was able to use some of the activities in her English classes. Some of the reasons why teachers had positive comments and showed great satisfaction over the lesson demonstrations I did was because they witnessed the teaching ideas or strategies in action in a real classroom and they could easily transfer it to their classroom.

Similarly, participant 8 preferred “directly related” to her teaching or her subject that would teach her new teaching techniques. In terms of the nature of the workshop, both participant 8 and 10 preferred those where they could actively participate which helped them to retain what they learned and easily transfer it to their classrooms. Participant 8 disliked lecture type workshops which were easy to attend but she couldn’t retain anything she learned from such a professional development program.

Professional Development: Learning from Peers

According to participant 5, during educational meeting, teachers complained and requested for more workshops (professional development programs) to improve the quality of teachers and the school administration has always accepted their request. However, there were also instances when the Principal would tell them that workshops are not important and that teachers can “learn from their colleagues” since there are lots of “resourceful teachers” in their school and that they don’t need an “outside person.”

Sharing through mini-workshops. Both participant 6 and 8 had not attended any professional development program per se. However, they both thought that those teachers who got chances to attend those programs should share whatever knowledge or experiences they gained. Participant 8 called this a “mini-workshop.” Based on the

experiences of the 10 participating teachers, professional development opportunities were rare. Therefore, sharing what one learned among the teachers within the same school/section/department through mini-workshops was one way to benefit from the professional development programs that few teachers get to attend. Participant 9 and 10 stated that they benefited from the sharing sessions and discussion with their colleagues who had attended professional development workshops.

Of the ten participants, two participants, who had the highest number of years of service, had a chance to attend a workshop in another school that taught them how to use the SRA Reading Laboratory kit that the school had bought a few years ago. The teachers call it “the most expensive resource” on campus. Participant 2 wrote after attending the workshop, “Now we got some ideas to use the language kit here. We have decided to start it this year (2008).” She also wrote about sharing what they learned about using the language kit with the other teachers through a mini workshop and plans to share more as they use the language kits in their classes. On May 2nd, she used the Language kit in one of her classes. She took guidance from one of her colleagues who had started using before her who actually was the first one to use the expensive resource. She wrote, “The main benefit of the programme is that a teacher can take into consideration of the students’ difference in learning ability....I really enjoyed doing this and learnt a lot of strategies both in reading and writing which I would like to share with my colleagues.”

Sharing through grade-level or subject-area groups. According to participant 10, most teachers found that the workshops they attended were not relevant. She suggested discussion and sharing time among teachers teaching the same grade level as more

beneficial for teachers than workshops that didn't address their needs. Participant 3 thought "Math and Science departments do really good sharing." Despite her disappointment with this group of teachers over not sharing with others, including herself, she thought the sixth grade English teachers did good sharing among themselves on teaching the contents of the English textbook and the language skills. Participant 4's personal preference for professional development program was holding a "sharing meeting" among teachers which she believed was "more helpful than calling a resource person who is not very informed about our needs." She believed "resource people have different ideas and we have different needs here and their ideas do not fit into our needs here." She thought that a "sharing meeting" like the Opportunity Class (OC) teachers had would be more beneficial. She added, "Since we know our own needs, if we can as a team work together, it would be much beneficial for all the teachers." It could be school-based and within the same school or with teachers in other nearby schools.

If participant 4 were to put together a professional development program, she would definitely stress "team learning." She believed that "because we live in a small society, we need to learn from each other." She would like to build an environment where:

The teachers share everything with each other and when sharing with each other they are also comfortable with each other. And the whole atmosphere becomes a learning place where the teachers as well as students are learning together. Specially, the teachers whenever we are together we learn from each other. So, that's one thing and another is...yeah, one thing I felt is more than the textbooks or the books...sometimes we learn more from each other. Because we share the same things: same ideas, same problems and for one problem we can give different solutions and different solutions we learn lots of things. So, because of that I would like to have a collaborative or team learning situation. We are all learning together.

Though the research on professional development reviewed for this study were conducted in completely different environment compared to the present study, the results revealed a lot of similarities in terms of teachers' perception of professional development and their preferences for professional development programs. The literature on professional development reviewed for this study described traditional professional development, and this study too found that the few professional development opportunities that the participating teachers experienced were "not aligned with active learning. Teachers typically sit and listen to an expert who advocates active, hands-on learning for students but puts little of this talk into practice. Furthermore, the topics are not close to relevant" (Fischer, 2004, p. ix). As did the teachers in Porter, Garet, Desimone and Birman's (2003) study, teachers in this study preferred a professional development experience that "provides opportunities for active learning; is coherent or consistent with teachers' goals and other activities; and involves the participation from the same subject, grade, or school" (p. 5).

Similarly, the results of this study indicated that the participating teachers did not receive consistent high-quality professional development. The content of the professional development program was a key factor. The participating English teachers preferred activities that focused on improving their pedagogical skills in teaching English such as teaching poetry, teaching reading and writing, teaching grammar, to mention a few. They preferred "sharing meeting" with their colleagues rather than listening to an expert who is not well educated in the needs and concerns of the teachers working in a particular local context.

Practicing Teachers' Perception of Teacher Learning

To provide a description and analysis of practicing teachers' perception of teacher learning, two major categories with sub-categories were developed.

One of the participant's gracious yet candid comments regarding how their participation in this research has provided many learning opportunities for them gave an idea of what teacher learning meant to them:

Your coming here has not only sparked a... actually it has created a big flame in our heart. For the first time, as I told you, we learned this word called Teacher Learning. Because one becomes a teacher, he thinks, "Now it is the end of learning." So everybody, ...those close circle where we discuss were saying, "Yeah, there are some things that we need to learn." And we, yeah, as I said come to that new term Teacher Learning. We have never thought about that.

"Teacher Learning" seemed to be a new term in the teachers' vocabularies. Several times during the interview sessions with the individual teachers, teachers hesitated when I asked them questions on teacher learning. There were few instances where the teachers would quickly associate learning with students and talk about their learning instead of theirs. However, the above quote doesn't mean that teachers in that school were not concerned about their learning or lack learning. Participant 4 added:

So, all the discussions that we do actually help us to learn many things, also to develop ourselves. But we have never thought about teacher learning till you came here! Yeah, we realized that we need to develop ourselves. And we were learning when you came here. That is what I personally feel. We never discuss about developing ourselves or anything. Whenever we discuss something, we say we have problems here and we want to solve that. So, it was more or less like answering the problems that we were facing in our day to day job. It's not like we have a very... you can say deep rooted idea that we should develop ourselves or learn ourselves. So we were doing many things but it was not directed or intentional to develop ourselves.

Personal Characteristics

Participants 6 and 7 definitely thought that the teachers in their school could be categorized as “learning teachers.” The former teacher emphasized this point by defining teaching as “a learning process.” According to participant 10, the teachers read frequently but “they don’t learn frequently...there are lots of teachers who are not learning but they always complain that there is no time to learn.” The teacher believed that if one wants, one could always make time. She added, “There are lots of time...but only thing is we are in the habit of giving lots reasons behind the time.” Similarly, participant 6 was hesitant to call all teachers “learning teachers” but definitely considered herself a learning teacher. She added, “I learn a lot...I’m still learning. I wanted to learn more also.”

To participant 5, a learning teacher is someone who:

Loves to learn, loves to share, and loves to encourage others to build the skills in the subject. A learning teacher should not be proud. She should have an understanding with the weaker teachers and he should always have the energy and guts to encourage the weaker teachers to read....she should be very sociable and cooperative, and a good organizer. And she should love fun. She should treat all teachers equally.

The teacher found that some teachers gave “special respect to the senior teachers and less to the OC (opportunity class) teachers.” She thought that was “a very bad point” because she believed that every teacher should have “a good human thought.” She believed that all teachers can learn from and with each other irrespective of what grade level one taught or irrespective of the years of experience one had.

To participant 3, a professionally learning/growing teacher is some one who is open-minded, patient, cooperative, supportive, and sociable. She believed the more teachers socialized, the more they would be able to share. “A good teacher should be a

good learner” was the advice that participant 1 got from her teachers at her teacher education school. Later when she started teaching, she noticed that the school principal emphasized this point in all of his meetings with the teachers. She added:

Teacher should learn, develop oneself. He always encourages the teachers to do this. In every speech, I have observed this very, you know, strongly myself that he always emphasize on teacher to develop themselves and but it depends upon the individual teacher, they'll respond or not but this has influenced me a lot. And I always feel myself I must learn everyday.

Participant 4 always thought that as a teacher who didn't receive “regular teacher training,” she always felt that there were “many things that I do not have that others have.” As a result of this feeling:

...I feel that I always need to work more than the other teachers to come to that level where I will feel comfortable teaching. So, um...a teacher has to even after receiving training...training is usually is a more or less formality here in India. It's more like a formality receiving B. Ed. So, even after getting the B. Ed. Training, when we come out and start teaching here, there are many things which do not fit into the teaching society here. The things that we have learned in the training program do not fit here. So, we have to start adapting ourselves to all those things. So, a teacher has to keep on learning according to the need...the levels of the students after understanding the students, their needs, their attitude and aptitudes. Yeah, all these...after studying all these, the teacher has to learn or teacher has to try to uh...think about different methods and strategies to best teach them. So, sometimes even in one class the teacher may have to use different strategies to teach different...students of different levels. So, a teacher has to keep learning. And that learning should not be restricted on one area...has to learn from different things like by reading books or by discussing with others or by asking another teacher who might be senior to you or more experienced than you. These are the best...best ways and through these teachers can keep on learning....I will keep learning because that is a very important thing...because I have to learn for my students.

The qualities of a learning teacher highlighted by the participating teachers not only reflected the characteristics the teacher himself/herself should possess for self-development but also qualities those qualities that should inculcate to make

himself/herself easily accessible for colleagues to approach him/her. Many of the qualities in the list fall under “some of the broadly acknowledged qualities of effective teachers” (p. 204) that Nieto (2005) presented: “a solid general education background, a deep knowledge of their subject matter, familiarity with numerous pedagogical approaches, strong communication skills, and effective organizational skills” (p. 204). The following is a list of some of the characteristics of a learning teacher or a professionally learning teacher highlighted by the participants that aligned under the characteristics presented by Nieto (2005):

A solid general education background. A learning teacher is some one who:

- has good education background
- has regular teacher training

A deep knowledge of their subject matter. A learning teacher is some one who:

- has interest in the subject you are teaching
- possesses good subject knowledge

Familiarity with numerous pedagogical approaches. A learning teacher is some one who:

- thinks and learns about different methods and strategies to best teach the students
- adapts teaching methods after understanding the students, their needs, their attitude and aptitudes

Strong communication skills. A learning teacher is someone who:

- likes sharing, encourages other to share, learn, and develop
- is approachable, friendly, sociable, and understanding

- is supportive, helpful, generous to everyone, and not jealous about others,
- is creative, resourceful, keeps himself/herself informed
- is dedicated, patient, polite, and sincere, and unbiased
- is open-minded, curious, inquisitive, and humorous

Effective organizational skills. A learning teacher is some one who:

- is a good planner and a good organizer
- is someone who is always able to find time to learn and grow as a professional
- is responsible, hard-working, and active all the time

The above characteristics taken together define a teacher who is enthusiastic about learning and sharing which in turn show that they are aware of the importance of their own growth.

Personal Actions

In her book, *Why We Teach*, Sonia Nieto (2005), in addition to recognizing “the broadly acknowledged qualities of effective teachers” (p. 204) visited in the previous section, suggested five “qualities of caring and committed teachers” based on her analysis of reflective essays contributed by 21 teachers who have been working in a variety of school settings for more than a decade. According to the author, these five qualities encompassed many of the qualities of the discussed earlier and suggested “key attitudes and sensibilities that define the teachers” (p. 204) in her book and “many others who serve the young people” (p. 204). The five qualities are: “a sense of mission; solidarity with, and empathy for, students; the courage to challenge mainstream knowledge; and a

passion for social justice” (p. 204). The sub-categories emerged for personal actions seem to fall under these five qualities.

Responsibility for professional learning. According to Nieto (2005), “both older and more recent research on teachers’ attitudes and values confirms a sense of mission to be an underlying motivation for many teachers” (p. 204). Teachers in this study spoke about the sense of mission in terms of professional responsibility since the study focused on their learning. Participant 4 talked about “making a difference in the lives of many students:”

A teacher can learn best when the teacher feels that he/she has a great responsibility and whatever a teacher is doing is going to make a difference in the lives of many students. So, if a teacher has that idea in his/her mind, it will help him/her to develop themselves also.

To develop herself as a teacher, participant 4 read. She added:

I read a lot and nowadays my reading has become quite limited to the subjects that I teach because I don’t get much time. So when...whenever I have time, I read about those things, those chapters, those lessons and any other books related to those lessons....Uh...yeah the best thing that I can do for myself is to read and I read a lot about the subjects, about the lessons....So, whenever I find books...whenever I go outside and find books which have some references to the lessons that I teach here or some lessons where students find difficult, I at once buy that book and read it and share the information with my students.

Participant 8 read a couple of journals that the school library subscribed which she had found useful for teaching English. She also liked reading interesting books to enrich her knowledge and it enhances her teaching if the topic she read was related to a lesson that she was to teach. P8 took advantage of the internet facility that the school had since September, 2007 to look for more information on the lessons that she taught. This process has been a learning experience for her as a teacher. Participant 7 also used Internet

regularly as a resource for learning for himself. He discussed with his colleagues to improve his learning but it is limited. He added, “Well, to say frankly, I don’t have any kind of a planned activities with my colleagues.”

Participant 5 read books and shared any interesting books that she came across with her colleagues. Similarly, the school headmaster, when he came across any interesting books related to teaching or teacher development, he shared with the teachers and encouraged them to read. Sharing usually happened during the lunch time while eating and sometimes before the morning assembly. Participant 5 found the latter more efficient since most of the teachers were present and she got lots of ideas from many teachers. P5 also thought that it was the responsibility of the senior teachers to socialize with the new teachers, to encourage them to participate in the activities so that they could establish a good relationship with them.

Participant 1 described herself as a person “who always learns... loves to learn.” She believed that it is her responsibility to clear her doubts or find solutions to her everyday teaching challenges. She explained:

Whenever there is some confusion in my mind and if I go to the class with the confusion, I never feel happy with myself. I always try to clear my confusion. For that I try to do whatever I can... wherever the resources available in front of me in easy way. If I need to, if I have time to go to the library, I go there and if the time is very limited sometimes, before... within five minutes to go to the class, I get a lot of ideas in my mind and at that time I used to go to the staff mini computer room and look at the Encarta and I used to take information from them and sometimes I ask to my friends who are there in the staff room. Whether the teacher is teaching English or not, I always ask them...clear my doubts and that way I think I’m learning a lot. I think learning is clearing oneself...one’s doubt and confusion in the mind. When we prepare in a different environment where the students are not there in front of us...when we get into the class, when we interact with the student, the environment is totally different. At that time the students ask different question to us and we try our best to give the right answer. Sometimes, if

I don't know the answer, I don't feel ashamed to tell them that I don't know the answer. I tell them truly teacher is not computer, teacher is not god...there are so many things that I don't know. I also need to learn and I'm sorry today I don't know this and I'll ask other teachers or I'll find out and I'll let you know tomorrow. And tomorrow when I go to the class, I make sure to do what I promised...give the right information to them and through these daily process of teaching career, I feel myself learning a lot and developing myself a lot and I feel all the teachers should do this. We should not give one lesson or topic to learn or something like that. On the basis of our everyday work, we must learn ourselves. Whenever we have doubts, whenever we cannot answer the students' question, we should not tell the students, "shut up" or suppress their mind. I think we should give ourselves a chance to learn by telling them, "Okay, I'll find out myself and I'll tell you tomorrow." And that is very important and I felt very happy when you came to our school with this topic and I also joined through your invitation joined the research with you and I felt very happy because I thought that it is not a very difficult task. It is something that we do in our everyday life and I felt it is very useful and teacher learning is very important if the teacher is very committed to his or her own career. I feel this topic is very good and interesting. And it is not one month or one day task, it is related with daily basis and that's why it's very interesting and very good.

Participant 1 emphasized the importance of developing good habits. She regretted not having developed a very good reading habit when she was in school. She added:

The most important thing teacher should have a lot of good habits.... I think that if I have a good reading habit...reading is a very good way to give us a lot of idea to develop ourselves and also it will help us to develop our creativity. We can get a lot of ideas from you know, the books and therefore, my weakness is I don't have good reading habit and I feel that I should develop in my student good reading habit....this is something I think is very important habit that we should develop for teacher learning. I think this habit will help a lot to learn ourselves as teachers. Umm...sharing is also very important...we can get idea but if you have reading habit, I think share more, you know. We can always have lot of advantage. So, this is another thing for teacher learning.

Participant 2 usually used her free class hours and after school hours to go to the library to find books that she could read to improve her learning. During the winter holiday time, she usually read books and picked reading materials that were relevant to her students and planned ahead for the classes that she was required to teach when the school started.

She also communicated with her friends to get more information and learn more about topics of her interest. She wanted to do her further studies to improve her learning but she never got enough time to think about her studies with all the teaching assignments and other responsibilities as a teacher. When it came to teacher learning, she found that the senior teachers were more concerned about learning than the younger teachers. She thought the latter were “careless.”

Commitment and encouragement. One of participants commented half-jokingly, “I think from next year, I may also be able to use the internet (laughs). That’s my commitment for 2008.” Encouraged by her colleagues, participant 5 shared a similar commitment. She planned to use computer and Internet facilities more often in the following years. She was also encouraged to use Internet as a resource for teaching when I asked her what additional preparations she did for the lesson she taught. In a way she was forced but she was happy with what she learned during the process. To cite another example, another colleague (then computer teacher) encouraged them to learn computer. Participant 5 confessed that all her friends learned and she was a little behind. She used most of her free time reading and correcting students’ book because she used all her class hour with students speaking and writing. Many times even her free periods were not sufficient and she took her students’ books to her room.

For a teacher, it is easy to get absorbed and lost in the daily teaching and correction work unless one makes a commitment to do something for professional or personal growth. One of the most experienced teachers got an education degree (Bachelor of Education) while she was teaching through a correspondence course. Through personal

communications, I gathered that two primary teachers were working on undergraduate degrees (Bachelor of Arts) through a correspondence course offered by an Indian university and one secondary teacher was working on a graduate degree (Master of Arts). Another teacher who already had a Master's degree hoped to do some advanced graduate studies in the future. One teacher got a one-year scholarship to study in an American university and is currently taking some courses in Educational Technology.

Sharing and collegiality. According to participant 2, "Teachers can learn best through sharing. I think it is very important. The more we share, the more we learn." Participant 8 thought that sharing was the "primary culture" of the school. Participant 2 firmly believed that the friendly nature of the staff members, always ready to help each other is a "plus point" of the school. She also pointed out that teachers really liked sharing. For instance, participant 6 mentioned that he learned best by sharing. To him "sharing is the most important thing which we do frequently." Further more, the teacher insisted on sharing both positive and negative experiences. Participant 6 also pointed out that many teachers share negative experiences only.

Participant 1 enjoyed sharing and she tried her best to encourage other teachers to do the same. However, when it came to sharing she advised that one needed to do it carefully. She explained, "the people I approach...I used to observe very carefully ... on a daily basis. If the person is very, you know, like interactive, very positive ... if I feel very comfortable to deal with, I used to approach them." As good luck would have it, she had never come across such individuals. She added, "whoever I approached, they have been so kind and showing lot of attention to help me. And that's why I'm very happy."

Participant 1 also explained the importance of creating a collegial environment in order to have good sharing among colleagues. Both collegiality and sharing demanded some level of courage on the part individual teachers. For instance, teachers needed to be bold enough to ask questions to anyone, even to the ones that other teachers felt uncomfortable with. She explained how it depended on one's own personality too and shared her experiences with a teacher which many teachers described as "serious." Participant 1 described her as a friendly and helpful colleague despite her serious appearance:

Whenever I talk to her, she looks very friendly though she has got a very serious appearance and outlook but when I interact with her, she is always very helpful and she is also very resourceful...one of the most resourceful language teacher in our school. And I respect her a lot because I have learnt a lot from her.

Participant 4 talked about how one's comfort level affects sharing and collegiality. She stated:

When I have doubts or when I want to share something, I do that with few selective teachers. Few selective in the sense that those few teachers who are willing to discuss like X. Because some even if we ask them questions, they are not so co-operative or responsive. So there are few teachers with whom I feel comfortable sharing my ideas and also asking for opinions and I do that very often with them. And also, sometimes with teachers of other subjects.

To her, irrespective of with whom she shared she believed that sharing is a good way of learning and helping other teachers learn. When she started teaching as a fresh graduate with no teaching experience or teacher education, she used to ask a trained (primary) teacher and learned a lot from her. According to participant 4, whenever they attended workshops, they shared whatever they learned with the ones who didn't have the chance

to attend. Speaking personally of herself, she felt that discussion with colleagues was very helpful. It encouraged “team learning and sharing.”

Participant 3 shared only those activities or teaching ideas that worked really well in her classes. For example, those activities that gave her “100% involvement from the students.” She also shared and discussed with some selected colleagues-the ones who asked. She also thought most of the teachers didn’t seem to do a lot of sharing. She added:

With people you feel closer...for example X, Y, and Z...they do good sharing because they have same sixth grade. However, they don’t share with us. Actually, if they had a good teaching, they could say, “This went on very well.” Such things are rare. If we ask them, they might tell us. These days it is difficult to ask others because if we ask someone they comment, ‘She thinks she is an expert.’ That’s why, no one asks each other. They don’t share also. However, I have seen those three doing good sharing. Others, I haven’t seen sharing... haven’t seen much in the Senior Section. In my OC, most teachers are new and they don’t ask the older teachers much.

She learned that there were many good English teachers and she hoped that if they shared, they would be able to learn many things from them. As a teacher, she learned best while teaching when she interacted with her students. In the process of finding answers to the many questions that her students asked in the class, she learned a lot. Irrespective of whether the teachers discussed or not, she thought they were concerned about their learning.

Like most of the participants, participant 1 also believed that “sharing with each other” is the best way to learn and grow as professionals and she did that on a regular basis. She believed that every teacher needed to understand that such behaviors can not be imposed. Sharing must be spontaneous. Every teacher must have a strong urge within

themselves to learn. Participant 1 thought that though in general teachers shared and discussed among themselves, they were not very serious with their own learning. She added:

Never and nobody seems to be interested and no body seems to be trying to know something about it. So, all of them seems to be in their own world. So, I feel it is very interesting and may be because these teachers they don't have grow up themselves...mental development is lacking. I think they need to come out from their own world.

Practicing Teachers Perceptions of Necessary Resources and Environment for Learning

Two major categories with sub-categories provide a description and analysis of practicing teachers' perception of necessary resources and environment for learning.

Resources for Teachers

Comparing the availability of resources today to the past, participant 5 commented, "Our school has made lots of development... in the past, we didn't have a language lab. We have no computer facilities and we don't have much resourceful reference books in our library. Now, it is totally extended. We have got enough." All the teachers agreed that the school provided enough resources. Participant 7 pointed out whenever there was a shortage, the school was always ready to provide any resource recommended by the teachers if it was helpful. Participant 4 explained:

Because according to the time and change, the school is trying its best to provide everything for the teacher, like last year, we did not have the language lab and we were crying for it and they provided it this year. And with the language lab...opening of the language lab, we also learnt how to use different techniques and technology to develop our teaching and also now the school is trying to provide us with the internet. So, the school is doing everything and I think we don't have much to complain about these. So it is the teachers themselves to use all these things to develop themselves.

Educational resources. According to participant 6, resources for teachers were in abundance and it is the teachers themselves who need to learn to use the various resources (internet, language lab, etc.). Participant 6 was quite satisfied with the teacher resources available and projected a greater usage of these resources by the younger teachers since they are more computer literate. He used internet as a resource for teaching whenever he needed more information on a particular topic. Other teachers also do the same. However, he also pointed out that the school should work more on motivating those teachers who were not very comfortable using computers and internet resources.

During the years when the teachers didn't have internet, though, there were five computers in the teacher computer room for 60+ teachers; they used some educational software and it became an important resource for teachers then followed by the school library. Now that they have internet, for participant 8, it has become the most important resource since she could access day-to-day new information. She also agreed that her colleagues were important resources for her and called them "fundamental." According to participant 8, she thought, "There are enormous resources and if there is not, we can demand for it and our school management gives us every time" and most of the resources were being used effectively. However, if there was an expensive resource, teachers were reluctant to use it. To illustrate this, participant 8 gave the example of a language kit (Reading Laboratory) provided by the school many years ago which has not been used by the teachers until this year (2008) when one teacher started to use it. (This teacher started using it only after attending a workshop on how to use it). Many teachers have not used it

because it was expensive and the school principal constantly reminded the teachers of the value (money) of the resource and stressed on proper usage and handling.

Participant 2 believed that reading books would be a natural thing for all teachers and that provided one kind of resource for teachers. Another effective source for her was visiting other schools, especially classrooms and talking to the teachers in those schools. Participant 4 shared a similar view. According to her, arranging a teacher exchange program with the neighboring schools might be a good source of learning for teachers. She also recommended workshops like the ones given by the Indian resource person, lesson demonstrations by experienced teachers of their school. Like several other participants, she also pointed out that many times teachers are provided with an expensive resource (e.g., Reading laboratory/language kit) and then told to be extremely cautious while using it. The teachers were too frightened to use it. Moreover, many teachers did not know how to use it and those who wanted to try were too scared that they might damage it. Participant 4 tried to figure out how to use it and wanted to try it but the person in charge was too scared to let her handle it.

Despite those frustrating challenges to access the resources provided by the school, she felt that they have “the best of all things,” “many good resources like the internet,” and “five computers (for teachers) and from five two are working now.” Therefore most of the participants including participant 1 suggested that the school should provide more computers for teachers (at present 6 computers for 70 teachers) and a bigger computer room “because these days we can save a lot of time if we can explore through the internet and use a lot of ideas from the internet. Going to the library and then

you know, the librarian also has a lot of work with the student you know, they have to make entries and then the teacher don't know where the books are. First to find the place of the book, it takes a lot of time and then after finding the book then they have to again find.”

Peer observation and lesson observation. Though participant 9 never had a chance to do peer observations with her colleagues, she considered it as a good source of learning for teachers. On the other hand, participant 7 had a chance for peer observation and he explained the experience as “something very fruitful” to both the peers.

Participant 4 also suggested that one good way to promote teacher learning was through peer observation. However, she also warned that “it cannot be forced from the school.

The teachers themselves have to do it.” P4 tried to work with another teacher for an arrangement like that in the past but it didn't work due to conflict in schedule. She hoped to try it again the following year. Participant 5 was not in favor of peer observation but she thought it was beneficial to both the peers. She was not confident that she could do a peer observation herself but was willing to try. She mentioned that she discussed and shared a lot, especially with those colleagues who taught the same grade level English. She guided new teachers by doing the same too.

Participant 7 believed that lesson observation was a good source of learning if one got some feedback. In his experience, sometimes observers came and left without “uttering a single word” about “what lacuna you have, “what mistakes you have made,” “what you have to overcome,” and “what are the other ways to improve your teaching.” He would appreciate and preferred a discussion of the lesson observation not just an

ineffective general remark. For participant 3, the 20 hours of lesson observation she took part as a research participant was a learning experience for her. She recommended lesson observations as a source of learning for teachers, urging that the school could and must make arrangements in the future for such learning opportunities. She explained:

So, personally I feel that going for observations will be really good. Because one can't see one's shortcomings and the other person will point your shortcomings and then one can improve on that. Therefore, if the school sets up a schedule for teachers to observe each other or if the school itself came for observations, not many times but once a month, the lesson observations help teachers prepare well. Usually, when we think of teaching a lesson, one thinks that one has taught the lesson in the past and I don't have to do much preparation and we ignore it. However, if someone were to observe the lesson, no one wants to lose respect and then one tries to do the best. So, we plan better and we can also find out one's own shortcomings when one judges from the back...how much is students' involvement...in our teaching, a teacher need not be the expert. We need students' involvement. So, personally I feel that it will be really good if we have lesson observations. When gyen la came last time, during that time I learned a lot...when you observed me. And when I observed you, during that time I learned a lot. That's why I think there should be observations. If the school made an observation schedule, "Tomorrow you go there and come here." If the school made something like this, even if the other one doesn't like it, it has been made by the school. Otherwise, if someone went out her own will, the other might say, "She acts like an expert and coming to observe me." If the school made the arrangement, no one can say anything. If we find out each other's shortcomings, we will learn and improve.

Participant 8 too considered lesson observation as a good source of learning for teachers. She added, "This is one of the good ways to share. So, if we are good, we can help others. If others are good, we can get from others." She had mixed feelings about peer observation. She thought they would like having a peer observation but at the same time, they would feel nervous during that time. However, at the end of the process, she believed that "they would be enjoying the observation because they would get new techniques from the observer."

Carving time. Though participant 4 was satisfied with the availability of the resources, like most teachers she felt that teachers didn't have enough time. She added,

Time is one thing, you know, in ABC schools, teachers don't have time (laughs). And yeah, that's one thing. Teachers also need time...personal time especially those with family. But sometimes, we feel yeah, that is one uh...very strong feeling among teachers that the school does not think about personal time. Yeah, that's right.

Participant 3 had similar thoughts about resources like participant 4. She added:

We don't have time. Otherwise, it is fine...resources...we are fine. These days we have better resources...everything. We have resource room and there are plenty of reference books in the library. In our school, we have many good teachers to refer to...whether one refers or not will depend entirely on oneself. They are good ones.

Participant 5 agreed with her colleagues regarding the abundance of resources in the school. However, she felt that because there are so many teachers and very few

computers, sometimes they failed to use the resources, like computers and the Internet.

An additional obstacle to that was the shortage of time. Participant 5 explained: "In a day, we get two free periods, which we use for checking, right? After the class, again we have other school activities and like this, the time goes and we don't get much time to use the resources." Participant 1 worked hard to live up to the expectations of her students

especially regarding correcting their written work. She explained:

Students, here especially, they need their work to be checked on time and I myself is putting a lot of effort in keeping their expectation...sometimes my husband is shouting at me because all the pile of notebooks end up in my home....sometimes I get only one period. I have 5 period and then 1 period free...at that time I go to library and some other work...doing some other research. And then you know, now I don't have time...the only option is, I can carry them to my home and after my baby sleeps, I feel myself I'm having a good...the best time to give to my students. Then I struggle myself...I stay very late, until I finish my work and whenever I get small, small free time, I immediately touch their work and check their work.

More time was what all the participants agreed unanimously. For participant 8, if she had more time, she could search more. Participant 10 was a little concerned about the use of resources by the teachers. She believed that the resources were not being used efficiently due to lack of time.

Participant 9 shared a contrasting view. She thought that the resources were being used effectively by teachers, at least the ones that were easily accessible. She also mentioned about the Reading Laboratory that many teachers including herself were waiting to use. The participant also indicated that the teachers needed to take out time from their already packed schedule to prepare themselves well in order to use these resources effectively for teaching language. As a result, despite her planning, she had not been able to use the Language Laboratory. Therefore, teachers needed more time to plan. As a language teacher, participant 9 found that with the number of students (30-40) in each of her classes and the amount of correction work language teachers needed to do, time was not sufficient.

In order to carve out some time for teachers, I asked participant 4 if the teachers would value an extra time, may be an hour per day or may be an hour per week for professional development and she was hesitant if the school would provide such a time.

She responded:

I don't know how the school is going to provide time for us (laughs). Because we know...we as teachers know that whenever they provide us time to do something, that time is always taken out of our time. That means whenever we have holidays like Saturday afternoon or Sundays. So, I don't know. So, if for example, whenever we have meetings and if school gives us time like during the working days, teachers are usually serious. And they attend it and they sincerely discuss everything. But if it is taken after the class and they need their personal time, they

get a little restless and they get a bit unresponsive at times. And it is quite understandable. So, if school provides the time by taking the consideration of the personal time that we also need, I think the teachers will be co-operative and teachers will use it. Most of the teachers I mean will use it as they...most of the teachers have strong desire to develop themselves.

Most of the teachers agreed that teachers would value a sharing time if they were provided one by the school. Participant 8 then explained how the school usually provided such a time which they called "sharing day." According to her, this time was used mostly for reviewing the English syllabus for different grade levels followed by discussion of new syllabus and new activities that they could use in the classes. She found that in the beginning the teachers were reluctant because they thought it was "extra work" for them when they already had feelings about shortage of time. However, after they started sharing, they felt happy and the end result was great. Most of the teachers were very happy to share their ideas.

Participant 7 believed that "teachers will make the best use out of it" if the school provided some time for them to share and discuss. According to him, particularly in their school, where teachers had limited time, teachers would definitely appreciate it and it would be "very fruitful." In a similar vein, participant 5 thought that if the school carved out some time for teachers to devote to teacher sharing and learning:

It will make a great difference because if the school makes the time, every teacher will respect the time and attend the program. I think the teachers who fail to make a schedule like this it will bring a great benefit to those teachers, like me. It is compulsory timetable. So, we all can go there and do something which we usually fail to do.

However, participant 6 believed that such a time will not benefit the teachers because he thought that it was too formal. To him, sharing should be spontaneous and many times it

happened during lunch time when they were eating. Participants 9 and 10 believed that many teachers would appreciate it. As an English teacher, for participant 10 such a time would be valuable for discussing the challenges in teaching. Teaching poetry would be an example of a topic that she would like to discuss and share with her colleagues. Based on her first impression of the Arts Department meeting, participant 9 believed that the teachers would value such a time. She saw the teachers very open in discussing their thoughts and ideas except for the few new teachers including herself. However, she also pointed out:

It is not possible to share everything with everyone. Natures don't match and you won't feel comfortable sharing our thoughts with others. So, yes, I do find many but then there are many others who don't. We are the new comers so they may not feel comfortable sharing.

As for her, her comfort level grew as time passed by.

Participant 2 brought up another interesting aspect of providing such a time to collaborate and share. She suggested:

If they try to be more firm...if through the administrative level, they consider it quite important and if they firmly, you know, make announcement like...uh...tell the teachers it is very important and you must consider it very important and if they guide like this, I think the teacher can...teacher will give good cooperation because as a teacher working in this community, I have observed the character in the teachers that um...if a person...individual person takes responsibility, they don't give that much kind of expect...yeah. They don't give kind of respect and cooperation and things doesn't happen. Then it led to...the other person get discouraged and then they don't feel like taking responsibility next time. It is something very bad. And therefore, I think if the school administrator gave it a strong stand and then the teacher...I found that the teachers are cooperating because they know that it is part of school obligation they have to go. Otherwise, you know, principal will say this and that...I found because when the headmaster write some strong notice on the...word on the notice board, they say, "Oh, we must do that otherwise, Gyenla has written like that." That shows that teachers are giving some importance. And through that I felt that if the administrator will give some importance and firm direction then I think they'll really sit and talk and

share. And as I told you, last year the principal has given a schedule but the problem it was unable to conduct was I told you that there was no one to take responsibility.

Participant 3 didn't believe in purposely finding a separate time for learning. For her, learning occurred on a daily basis as a result of attending to the questions her students asked. She checked the reference books or approached her colleagues when she had doubts or if she didn't know something and in the process she learned. She usually shared and discussed during the break time. She thought that was the best time because it was not easy to carry out discussion in some body's home after school hours. Like most teachers, participant 7 also agreed that teachers liked sharing although they didn't really have a specific time for that. Teachers used their leisure time and free periods to share. After class, teachers were too busy with other work and they didn't have time to share. Moreover, he respected individual teacher's privacy after school hours and felt uncomfortable to invade that privacy. With the responsibility of a House master, he felt that it was taking away a lot of time and his "main work really suffers." He added:

Yeah, that makes a huge difference. Earlier, after class, I got lots of time like...doing corrections, paper checking or you just make a plan for tomorrow. By evening you finish everything. And these days, you have extra responsibilities. Moment the class finishes, we have so many extra works. So, by the time we reach home, you are exhausted, completely exhausted and these works definitely suffers....So, whenever I have any discussion, that's completely...I utilize my free period. Otherwise, I don't get time particularly, this year.

The school principal's role. Hord and Hirsh (2009) talked about the principal's role in supporting learning communities. According to the authors, among the 7 roles they highlighted, two were "emphasize to teachers that they can succeed-together," and "take time to build trust" (p. 22-23). The participating teachers also pointed out the above

two characteristic roles in their principal. Like several other participants, participant 1 also talked about the role of school principal in providing the resources teachers needed. She described him as “approachable” and someone who is always supportive of the needs of teachers in terms of resources. She added:

I think the school has done...the principal is always very approachable and always telling the teachers when you need something, you must always come up and the only thing is the teachers are not that much trying to be open towards the administrator. Then, we cannot do anything and otherwise the school has in terms of resources, they have developed a lot of the resources.

Like most of the other participants, participant 1 too talked about the expensive resources that the school provided:

The school has bought language kits. I heard that it was very expensive but it is still lying there...it is not being used because the teachers, they don't have idea. And last time, people are saying it is very expensive...when we say it is expensive, the teacher they feel afraid to take responsibility.

According to Participant 1, teachers were reluctant to use the resource because they were worried that they would lose it and they would have to pay for it. Therefore, the Arts department had to come up with a solution of making a duplicate copy of the resource that teachers could use without having to worry about damaging or losing the original. Teachers often got scolded by the principal for not using the resources he provided.

Teachers got the language laboratory that they requested. She explained:

Now language lab was installed, no body taking initiative you know, to use it. When I ask the other teacher now we have language lab, why don't you take your students there. They are saying, “I don't know how to use it.” Okay, so in the teacher learning, it is very important for the teacher to go there and see and find out and learn how to operate it. Until and unless they go to the language lab in-charge and talk to him... he'll teach...otherwise, I think next year also they'll tell me the same thing. So we have enough materials so, to use to the language lab for the speaking. So the teachers need to go there and explore what is inside the language lab, which one is suitable for their student level. They need to do

selection and then a lot of preparation is required in using the language lab. And if the teacher, if they don't take out their time themselves ahead, they will not be able to use it instantly.

Cultivating a Learning Environment

Nieto (2003) described how difficult it is to create a learning environment that will help in cultivating authentic learning communities because "more often than not, consciously or by coincidence, many schools are organized to encourage only competition and individual excellence" (p. 127). Nevertheless, in order to promote professional learning in teachers, a nurturing learning environment.

School/Teaching culture. According to participant 9, the communal aspect of Tibetan culture aided in cultivating a learning culture among the teachers. She explained:

I think it promotes rather than blocking. The feeling of oneness is naturally aroused. I belong to them and what I do is surely going to help my society in the future. So that sense of belonging is definitely promoting me to make things to the best of my abilities. I don't think it blocks in any way.

Participant 6 described his colleagues as "very unique, very energetic...very patriotic towards their nation or their students" and further added, "you are not going to find such kind of teacher in any other community or any other school which I saw so far." One important characteristic of the teachers the participant pointed out was the willingness to learn with one's colleagues and build a close relationship. Participant 10 described her colleagues as "very friendly and understanding teachers" and who loved to share. She described herself as a timid teacher but she enjoyed sharing teaching ideas or activities and believed that "sharing will bring you lots of knowledge...you'll become a rich teacher."

Participant 9's decision to join the current group of schools was highly influenced by how teachers in this group of schools worked together as a team. The "sharing of the knowledge when you have a doubt, getting cooperation, seeking help from others when you are in need" were some characteristics of these teachers that she observed. She described the teachers in the current school as "cooperative" teachers who come together as one when needed. Similarly participant 8 described the teachers as friendly teachers who help each other when they had doubts or concerns. She added, "Most of the teachers are very cooperative asking their doubts especially, the Science Department. And now this year the English Department has become very active since last year."

Participant 2 described the senior/experienced teachers as helpful. These teachers gave guidance to the new teachers and they were always ready to discuss their challenges. Based on her experiences so far, she described her colleagues' responses as "very pleasant." She thought teachers were approachable and they always welcomed teachers' queries. Having worked in another school where she thought there was a "disparity between the senior and the junior staff members," participant 1 was pleased to find a very welcoming and caring staff environment in her present school. She explained:

When I joined school XYZ, the teachers and staff members were very loving. They were showing a lot of concern. They have given us lots of guidance and the most beautiful thing about the co-worker environment here is, they don't have sense of seniority and underestimating the new teachers and looking down upon them. This is something that I have not found in school XYZ teachers. And with my experience till now, when new teachers come here, they were always telling me the same thing. They were telling me the teachers here very interactive and they never let us feel lonely and all these kind of thing. And I feel that this is a very good point of our staff members. Because in other schools, many teachers...they feel very lonely and they feel left out because the senior teachers were always looking down on them and all these kind of thing. They have a lot of

problem of adjustment but here I think we have a very beautiful environment and I hope the environment will not spoil.

Sharing and learning were spontaneous and informal as participant 7 explained: “You will see that the moment the teachers gather at any spot, say on the football ground, say in the tea shop, say in that particular, wherever they just have discussion, right. Today this thing...such thing happens anywhere they have been they are talking about student and they...(un)...what their experience...experience of the day, experience of the day before or experience of the week ago, right.”

Over the years, participant 5 saw teachers becoming more approachable and witnessed changes in their characters. Participant 5 cited an example of one particular teacher that she came across who was reluctant to respond to her request/problem in the past. Participant 5 approached this particular teacher because of her knowledge and teaching skills in English. However, today that “teacher has become very sociable and became close to us... she readily accepts my request willingly.”

The other colleagues with whom she usually discussed her problems were more approachable and participant 5 enjoyed discussing with one particular teacher because “when I ask her a little problem, she tries to explain in detail.” Therefore, despite the general friendly environment of the teaching community, there were also teachers who didn’t care much. For instance, participant 4 believed that teachers in her school shared a lot and they could be described as collegial. However, in terms of approachability, she found that not all were approachable. She knew a teacher who she thought didn’t share much and “not very much serious with her job.” Similarly, participant 1 also noticed the difference in comfort level among teachers not only between experienced and novice

teachers but also within the same groups. For instance, among the experienced teachers, some were very comfortable and always ready to share and learn something if they had doubts. Whereas there were also some who were not comfortable to interact with their colleagues. Participant described the latter group as having “some complex in themselves which make them uneasy to share the things.”

Motivators. Talking generally about teachers and what would motivate them to learn, participant 7 thought that discussing and sharing in groups motivated teachers to learn more from each other. The greatest source of motivation for him was the current situation of Tibet. He added:

Yes, particularly, the present situation in Tibet, we having a refugee status and these particular students, they came from far away leaving their parents. So, if you don't do good ... if you don't teach properly, if you don't utilize your time, I think being a Buddhist, definitely you won't earn a good Karma. And definitely, that will fall upon you and more over, you have a responsibility to build up your nation. So, such kind of a thought really motivates a person, particularly me.

This is probably true with all the Tibetan teachers and it is the primary reason for the Tibetan teachers' preference to work in a Tibetan school rather than working in an Indian school. For participant 9, her “conscience” is the primary motivation for her to do her best as a teacher. She added, “To give one's best to your students one must be willing to learn on a regular basis.”

Participant 8 talked about three sources that motivate her to learn or to become a better teacher. First, the professional development programs that she attended and the pieces of advice they receive from “great teachers.” She remembered one common advice, “Great teachers mean those who inspire students.” The second source of motivation for Participant 8 was her own self. She got great satisfaction from her

teaching and she always worked hard to make her teaching as effective as possible. In order to achieve that, she needed to learn. Her students were the third source of motivation for her as a teacher. In order to keep her students active in the class, she tried to learn new things to teach or to do in the class. For participant 4, the best source of motivation was her students. For example:

Whenever students are enthusiastic about learning, whenever they feel that they are eager to learn, then to address to their need and their enthusiasm, I also learn. So, personally, for me, my best motivation is the students themselves and may be a little bit understanding from the others, may be the administration because we also need lots of time to ourselves to read. They tell us to read such and such number of books but they never think about our personal leisure time. So, a bit of understanding from the administration and the students would motivate me to learn more but the best motivator, if you say, it is the students themselves because whenever I have a class, if the students are not so willing to learn, I also do not learn.

Since the teachers were crying out for time, participant 1 thought that “according to their wishes, if the number of period allotment can be reduced” that might motivate them to learn.

To some, student outcome was the greatest motivating factor followed by recognition of one’s efforts by the school administrators and colleagues. According to participant 6, recognition of teachers for their individual performance on their job plays an important role in retaining especially new teachers. Participant 5 thought that the school needed to pay more attention to the teachers. She reasoned:

Actually our school is not thinking much on teachers. The school is thinking a lot about the students’ development. The school is using the teachers to improve the students only. And so the teachers are left behind, right. I think the school should organize a number of activities to build the teachers’ creativity.

She made a few suggestions, “I think the school should give more time for teachers in learning and the school should organize a computer class for the teachers.” She also thought that a good facility in the school would motivate teachers to learn. For example, a good number of computers, resource books for teachers and relocating these resource or teacher’s reference books from the library to the teachers’ break room. She thought that this relocation would bring more benefits to all the teachers-the ones who visit the library on a regular basis and the ones who don’t. As for her, seeing her colleagues doing really good at teaching motivated her to excel as a teacher too, though the motivation was only short-lived. She explained candidly:

When I see other teachers teaching very fine, I feel bad (or jealous in a good way) and I feel that I should do something. So, I try. When I see the good qualities of the teachers, I think I also should be like that. Then I try to go to the library and read. So, after few days I forget (laughs).

Participant 3’s motivation was similar to participant 5. She stated:

I want to be someone that the students like. Students like only those teachers who are good. That’s why. While teaching, I want to do effective teaching. In order to do an effective teaching one needs to work hard. That’s why. I want to be that teacher on hearing whose name the students would say, “A is a great teacher.” I want to make myself into something like that. Because of that I do work hard.

To some, the school environment was important. For example, participant 7 mentioned:

Environment is very important... one of the motivating factors and another thing is, the helpful teachers, and good resources.... if you don’t have a good resource ...up to the mark, then definitely, that will de-motivate. Yes, so, I think these are things that help me.

Obstacles. Without any hesitation, teachers mentioned “shortage of time” as a major constraint to teacher learning and sharing. Teachers had very limited time to spend together and they used their break time, free periods and lunch time. In a similar vein,

participant 10 pointed out that though teachers loved to discuss, share and learn together, most of the time they didn't have enough time to do these activities. Most of their time is taken up teaching and daily lesson planning. She remembered discussing with her colleagues as they walked towards the class.

According to participant 2, they tried to schedule sharing time and had successful sharing time but many times when it didn't happen, it was because they didn't have enough time. Many teachers got heavy teaching assignments, like having to teach 4-5 classes per day. After the school hours, teachers were again involved in supervising co-curricular activities. So, if they had fewer classes to teach, they would have more time for self-development.

Participant 4 pointed out another obstacle to teacher learning and sharing. To her, colleagues' lack of positive response when she approached them blocked her from sharing. She explained, "Some even if we ask them questions, they are not so cooperative or responsive." As a result, her sharing was restricted to those with whom she felt "comfortable" which she did very often. To participant 10, lack of interest among the colleagues when approached and to participant 9, lack of understanding on the part of the colleague those she approached would be an obstacle to learning and sharing as a teacher. Responding to my questions regarding why some teachers did not like sharing, participant 4 shared her views:

Maybe, some feel that they don't have anything to learn from others. Some feel, maybe, if they share few things, others may look down upon them. They may not want to show their weaknesses. But I don't know. There are some teachers who even if we point out some mistakes they get irritated, behave very rudely. I don't know why they behave like that. Usually, this type of teachers are teachers who are new to our school. They do not wish to share. I personally feel it is because

they are new here and they have come very freshly out of the college and they may feel that we are old (laughs). And they have many more new ideas and they are much more...I can say...learned than us. May be that's why. Sometimes even I have heard that I was bit reserved and all these but I never feel that about myself. Whenever I had problems I shared it with others. So may be it's like that. I don't know. But personally, I have learnt that we learn a lot by sharing.

P4 then pointed out yet another obstacle to teacher learning and sharing. In her opinion,

“Something that blocks anybody from learning is the person's unwillingness to learn.”

She elaborated:

A person becoming stagnant after a few years of learning...the teacher thinking now I have become a teacher. Now I have nothing to learn about. Whenever teacher starts thinking like that then everything is blocked. But a teacher has to keep in mind that to light another candle he has to keep on burning. So, a teacher has to keep on learning....there are some teachers who think now I have achieved what I wanted, I have become a teacher so that's it. There is nothing to learn more about it. So that blocks everything.

Like the other participants, she also thought that school administration was always ready to support teacher development and thought that the greatest hindrance came from the individual themselves.

To participant 6, “demoralizing the other teacher” and “not to appreciate but to de-motivate that person” blocked teacher learning and sharing. Talking about approachability, participant 10 recalled an incident during the first year of her teaching. She liked discussing and she tried to talk to another teacher who never gave her any support as a senior teacher. Having learned a lesson from that experience, this year, when she heard that a new teacher is having some problem, she did her best to help the teacher by listening to him, sharing her lesson plan and giving teaching ideas. Such demeaning behavior was an obstacle to learning and sharing for participant 3 also. Such behavior discouraged participant 4. For her, “one needs to consider the other person's attitude”

before approaching him/her. She needed to feel comfortable to approach that person irrespective of whether that person is friendly or not.

To some teachers, imposition of strict rules and regulations from the authorities would be an obstacle to teacher learning. For example, for participant 9 that would definitely make her “feel little tight.” In her current school environment she said, “I feel very free.” To some when one’s hard work is not recognized by the person in authority that could be one blockage to teacher learning.

The next major obstacle to teacher learning and sharing was one’s ego. Participant 2 pointed out how one’s ego could block one from learning, “because you don’t ask others also if you don’t know. If you ask them you might feel that he/she will think that I don’t know this and that.” According to participant 3, one of the reasons why the sharing meetings that they scheduled were not successful was because “everyone has huge egos. So, if somebody shared something, others will say, ‘Huh, she thinks she is the expert.’ Therefore, those who want to say keep quiet. Because of that the meetings were not successful.”

Participant 1 emphasized learning from each other and explained why teachers did not do that at a satisfactory level. The reason she stated firmly was:

People are very egoist. I think may be because of the egoist attitude, it must be leading the people not to share, keep everything themselves. That’s not a good thing. And also, we should have a positive attitude. We should be acceptable. When we have some weaknesses, we should able to accept ourselves rather than getting angry, rather than hurting oneself. I think if somebody is suggesting something to you, in here we get angry very easily. If somebody gives you good guidance and advice, they say, ‘huh, she is saying this to me’...starts getting hurt and angry and that makes the other person uneasy to approach you. So, I feel we should have a lot of positive things in our attitude because it is after all an attitude which makes the person.

Therefore, for her, a positive attitude and an urge to learn would motivate her to share more and learn more. She pointed out a few more characteristics of teachers that would be obstacles to learning and sharing. She thought that because of “ego and sense of competition,” it was hard for teachers to appreciate others’ good work. She elaborated:

I always feel that because of ego and sense of competition, people, they feel if somebody is teaching very good, actually what should happen is, we should appreciate each other, “yes, she is teaching very good. I also learned from her.”...we don’t have this kind of attitude....instead of appreciating, the other one got hurt....I think we need a lot of change in our society especially in terms of attitude. We should always have a positive attitude in our mind, a sense of appreciation for each other and which is different from the western nation. In Tibetan community,...I told you the first one is because of jealousy....And the second one is lack of sense of appreciation. Never appreciate each other. And third one is, then when you meet each other, then the other one has already built up already a complex....then restrain from sharing, start building drift in ideas, making uneasy and uncomfortable environment to work. That all came because of jealousy and don’t try to cooperate. Some they have got a very negative mind. They will think, ‘okay, many people say that she is quite a good teacher,’ okay and then as I told you because of, you know, unable to bear the others’ good work...instead of focusing on self improvement...it develops in themselves feeling of jealousy. Once you have this feeling of jealousy, you know it will block...that will pull down yourself from you know doing so many things...to the other one. This is what I observed in our community. For example, if you are considered a very good, then those who are quite jealous will...when you are organizing something, they will try not to join...participate and make the work difficult...something like that...pulling down each other....Pulling down is not good and this kind of thing...mainly because of ego....Among the senior teachers you know, they have their own...what should I say...position then if they find somebody is better...they don’t interact much and stay in isolation, trying to be very reserved and I don’t find these kind of quality good. In our Tibetan community, sometimes people, you know, misinterpret, ‘Oh, she is very reserved’...something like that. I don’t find this kind of thing good because...uh...when you sit reserved, it blocks yourself from interaction with other people. If you cannot interact with other people, you cannot learn much. We cannot know other person you know, truly how he or she is. You cannot rely on other people and if other person is saying bad thing about another teacher...then you can agree with her, “uhh, yes, I also find...she is like that.” I think that kind of judgement is false judgement. To give a self judgement to analyze somebody, I think we need to interact. We need to open up a little bit and go deeper.

Talking about what blocked her from learning and sharing, participant 3 shared what she thought of herself:

I can't say about others but as an individual...sometimes I am scared of asking others because I wonder what the other person is going to say....I ask only when I find it impossible to do it myself. I feel that I could do it using whatever knowledge I have. That's why I don't ask others much. And one doesn't know one's shortcomings. Secondly, I think maybe I am a little too serious with other colleagues. Generally, I am frank but maybe others seem to see me as having some pride. So, I think this nature also blocks it. It will be good if one can come down a little. If everyone says, 'He is full of pride,' as soon as one arrives, I think this very nature blocks sharing and everything. Asking about something...even if you want to ask something, the other one will be scared thinking, 'This teacher is really serious. It looks like she/he'll say something.' So, I think one needs to have a friendly gesture for others. If this is done, there will be good sharing.

Participant 1 commented on the reserved nature of some teachers:

They sit reserved, they don't share, they may be considered sensible in that way. People they try to change themselves in such kind of thing. I feel, as a person that if we try to be more open, more interactive with each other...be conscious, it would give a very good way to develop oneself because we can get a lot of idea from each other. The society needs to change and here the society is co-workers...we need to change our environment. We should feel very comfortable with each other to share our ideas and also all the people should have good positive thoughts in their mind. If somebody is sharing, they should take it in a positive way, not thinking that she is trying to boost herself or she is trying to show off her knowledge. By understanding the other person in a positive way, I think that will create a very good environment and this environment will help us to learn from each other.

She also pointed out that she understood and respected a teacher's individuality and too much discussing and sharing hampered that individuality. However, she warned:

Too much of individuality...I feel sometimes individuality is very important but sometimes if you come out, if you share and if it is helping many other people, if it is helping in achieving your goal, I feel one should not sit back and talk about individuality. We should come out, interact and on some personal level, ...we can respect them but sometimes we have to know about when we have to cooperate and when we have to keep our things ourselves. And if we have got this kind of thought and sense in ourselves, we can have ourselves happy lives and we can also help the community.

To conclude, the literature reviewed for this study and the findings of this study came to similar conclusion regarding teacher learning. Teachers learned best when they were active learners and were able to relate their learning with their day-to-day work (Smylie, 1995; Sprinthall, Reiman & Theis-Sprinthall, 1996) and “resolve tensions between abstract principles and the complexity of the classroom practice” (Cohen, 1990; Lampert, 1984 in Smylie, 1995, p. 107). As Grossman (1992) emphasized, collegiality was an important characteristic in learning-to-teach which was invaluable for generating new ideas and providing feedback about practice to each other. The participants in this study too indicated that they learn best through sharing with their colleagues. Despite their own reservations about peer observations and lesson observations, the participating teachers thought those two were good sources of learning for them when it is accompanied by constructive feedback.

Similarly, when it came to resources, the major obstacles were time and funding. As Smylie (1989) found, in this study too “teachers perceived direct experiences in classroom as their most effective source of learning” (p. 545) and following by sharing with their colleagues or consultation with them. For the participants of this study, personal characteristics played a great role in the choice of their colleagues to share and ask for help. Interpersonal skills such as communications skills came out as major characteristics that teachers used to decide with whom to share, discuss and approach for guidance.

Unlike the studies reviewed for this literature, this study asked teachers what motivated them to learn. Teaching for them was more than just a job. Being Tibetan

teachers in a Tibetan school came with the heavy responsibility of educating the future seeds of Tibet. This fact motivated the teachers to learn and become better teachers for those students.

Communities of Practice

Neither students nor teachers do come to school to form a community. Students come to get education and teachers to earn a living. However, to pursue these personal goals, they work collaboratively, take and share responsibilities, interact with each other, develop practice and constantly engage in a variety of practices. Over time, a community is created. Within this bigger school community, there are smaller communities that share common practices, for example, a community of teachers. For teachers, it is this common practice of teaching under the same working conditions that they share which brings them together as a community. Working with each other, helping each other, arguing with each other, sometimes working against each other, discussing and sharing the good days and the bad days, teachers orchestrate their day-to-day work days and their interpersonal relationships in order to cope, sustain and succeed at their jobs. This is what makes teaching a practice and this community of practice helps sustain the teachers' ability to do their work. Talking about claim processors, Wenger (1998) noted, "the job can, in the abstract, be described in individual terms, it is easy to overlook the degree to which it is the community of practice that sustains the processors' ability to do their work" (p. 46).

This is true in the case of teachers too. The teachers are:

Quite aware of their interdependence in making the job possible and the atmosphere pleasant. They act as resources to each other, exchanging information, making sense of situations, sharing new tricks and new ideas, as well as keeping

each other company and spicing up each other's working days. (Wenger, 1998, p. 47)

It is through this "collective construction of a local practice" (Wenger, 1998, p.46) that teachers are able to meet the needs of the students and the demands of the institution.

The following coding categories were developed to address the second purpose of the research, to examine teacher learning from a community of practice perspective. The coding categories were derived from Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder's (2002) definition of the Communities of Practice and from themes that emerged from the data. According to the authors, "Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (p. 4).

Membership

Three sub-categories provide a description of the practicing teachers' common membership. Their membership ranged from being Tibetans to English language teachers.

Tibetans. Starting with a more general description, the first and obvious description that I wanted to offer was they are Tibetans. This is the common membership. They are Tibetans living in exile and struggling for freedom. They are Tibetans struggling to preserve their culture and tradition. The greatest concern they share is getting freedom from the communist China. Their greatest problem is how to pave that way to freedom. They are all passionate about Tibet and its freedom. They prayed together, held candlelit vigils, held rallies, held protest march, went on peace march, went on hunger strikes, listened, read, and watched the news as the Beijing Olympics torch

travelled around the world with mixed emotions: a feeling of antagonism towards China and a feeling of solidarity for the fellow Tibetans around the world who tried to stop the torch.

To be more specific, they are Tibetan teachers committed to educating the future seeds of Tibet. Participant 9 talked about how challenging a teacher's job is today with such responsibilities. She proudly added:

Yes, definitely (challenging) because the students who are under our care now are going to be our future citizens and they would carry on and struggle for our cause. So, in case even if we lose one student also...if they go in the wrong path...I think it is a great loss.

English language teachers. As an English language teacher, participant 9 was responsible and committed to make her students as good in English as possible since it is the universal language of communication. She believed in the power of English language:

Because when they go out in society...world, they should be able to speak the language that the world knows. So, if that is lacking, then whatever things that you have, you may have great ideas but you won't have word to express and naturally you will be lacking in it. So, the main thing that I have found so far and I have been telling my students, is to make them as rich as possible in the English language. And that I try to do it mainly through the speaking and the writing.... The main thing is speaking the ideas that they have. They must be able to speak in front of the people. Like, in future they may become the President of Tibetan Youth Congress and they will be able to express their ideas into words. Like, these days we get lot of exposure to media and in such cases, they will be able to stand up and say everything as other representatives. So, the main thing that is...I tell them that English uh...if we take an example of a tree, the root is the Tibetan, our Tibetan language, no doubt...it's like...the root of the tree is Tibetan language but then branches are all like the English language...the main branches that beautify the tree, it has to be the English language. The more you grow...the more you learn in it, the more beautiful you'll be and from within. And so, that is how you can...what to say...attract others to inform and say how you feel and what you are and how the things are in future.

Non-native English language teachers. Talking more specifically of the 10 participants, as non-native English language teachers teaching English in a foreign language context with limited or no exposure to the language except in their classrooms, their job is a challenge. It is made more challenging by the fact that English is the medium of instruction for all other subjects that are taught in the Tibetan schools from sixth grade onwards. As English language teachers, their greatest concern is how to make their students proficient enough in two years so that they can jump to 6th grade or even higher as all are already in their late teens as they arrive into this school with little or no schooling experience at all. The problems those teachers shared ranged from difficulties involved in teaching young adults a foreign language to taking care of personal problems of those young adults. The teachers are concerned about the smooth functioning of many of the co-curricular activities they are responsible for. One participant summarized:

We have lots of work to do in the school, not only the teaching. There are lots of extra activities that we have to handle like, for English Department, we have got co-curricular activities like debate, elocution, poetry recitation, quiz, play, etc., and after the 1st term, we have got life skills...the students are learning craft work, social work, and weaving, knitting, handwriting, music, computer, meditation, and yoga. And students who are very weak in study, they are having a remedial class for one hour everyday. And other teachers, the science and math teachers, they also have got a very tough job like holding quiz and essay competition. The Games Committee, they have lot of activities and cultural committee, they are holding the cultural activities.

Therefore, the teachers were not only English language teachers or Math teachers. There are so many different responsibilities involved that they had to wear several hats throughout the academic session. Despite all those unique challenges, the teachers were passionate about teaching English.

All in all, they are a community of teachers who “share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). The community played an important role in their learning as it created the fabric of learning. A strong community fosters interactions and relationships based on mutual respect and trust. It encourages a willingness to share ideas, expose one’s ignorance, ask difficult questions, and listen carefully. Community is an important element because learning is a matter of belonging as well as an intellectual process, involving the heart as well as the head.

Purpose

Two sub-categories describe the two major purposes served by the participating teachers’ membership in the various communities. Their common membership has encouraged them to share and learn together.

Sharing challenges. As non-native English language teachers teaching students who spoke the same native language, they needed the knowledge and expertise to teach the language effectively in such a teaching and learning context. The teachers needed to work hard and smart. As an English language teacher, participant 5 worked hard to teach her best. She added:

So I try to use the school library to build my teaching skill. Sometimes I talk with the teachers who are better than me to share their creativity so that I can make my teaching much better. Like this I always try to keep my students very active. Sometimes I wish to teach good but because of my problem in English, I fail to fulfill my expectations. So like this I’m doing, right? When I am assigned for something, I always try to do the best, right? Whenever I organize any kind of program, I work hard and I always get appreciation from the teachers, my

colleagues. So, my success fully depends upon the cooperation of my colleagues and my students.

Similarly, participant 4 recognized the challenges the English teachers needed to face today. According to P4:

Unlike earlier times, nowadays, a teacher needs to do lots of home-work. Teacher himself or herself has to prepare well because the teaching methods are changing and now it's not like text-book based. In the earlier times, if a teacher is clear about the text book lessons, then the teacher doesn't have much to do. But it's not that way nowadays.

The teachers agreed that teachers need to learn a lot in order to deepen their knowledge and expertise in their area of teaching. She added:

Yes, there are many areas where the teacher him/herself has to learn a lot and do lots of preparation. So it's more like doing more outside than inside the class. So, inside the classroom the teacher is more like a guide. So, to be a guide, the teacher has to do lots of things before going to the class. So in the earlier times it was not like that....So, these days teachers need to do more than earlier times and through that we also learn a lot. So, at the end of the year, we get more satisfaction. We see more developments in the students and students also learn more. But we need to prepare the students for all these changes because in our school, as you might be very well aware of, that our students like listening to the teacher and they like the teacher doing everything for them. Whenever an activity is designed where they have to do something, they don't have the confidence to do all these things, so we need to prepare the students as well. There are many things a teacher has to do....to be a good teacher, a teacher has to change.

Learning together. Reading a few pages in participant 10's journal, I found that she had been communicating with other teachers regarding teaching of a particular poem that I had a chance to team-teach in one class. I was happy to know that the teachers are sharing and communicating with each other to teach better. Her last comment indicated that this sharing experience has changed the way she taught the particular poem. She wrote, "This year, my teaching of poem 'Lochinvar' was very different from the last three years back. It was completely a new style." She also indicated that employing the

new teaching ideas not only made the teaching more enjoyable to students but also to her. She wrote, "With this idea, I also enjoyed teaching the students."

Many teachers mentioned about an expensive language teaching resource (Reading Laboratory) that no one dared to use or even tried to learn to use primarily because it was expensive. Having received strict instructions for good handling, no one was bold enough to start using it. However, as reflected in one of the participant's journal, one needed to do a lot of preparation to prepare herself and her students to do this program. Her journal concluded with a personal overview on Reading Laboratory kit. She wrote about how much this program benefited the students in developing reading skills and writing skills:

The main benefit of the programme is that a teacher can take into consideration of the students' difference in learning ability.... I really enjoyed doing this and learnt a lot of strategies both in reading and writing which I would like to share with my colleagues. The whole credit goes to Dr. Don Porker who worked so hard to bring this kit out and bring such a change in the teaching of English. Students showed so much interest and satisfaction in doing this programme.

Another participant wrote about the workshop she attended on how to use the Reading Laboratory. She wrote, "Now we got some ideas to use the language kit here. We have decided to start it this year." She also wrote about sharing what they learned about using the resource with the other teachers and plans to share more as they use the language kits in their classes. On May 2nd, she used it in one of her classes. She took guidance from one of her colleagues who had started using before her. The ones who got the opportunity to attend the workshop including the above two teachers shared with other teachers what they learned through the small workshop in school.

Bond

Three sub-categories provide a description of what held the participating teachers together in the communities. Their passion for teaching, commitment to teaching and learning, and their belief in sharing as an spiritual act held them together.

Passion. The Arts Department consisted of the Social Studies teachers and English teachers. The English teachers formed a very important group of teachers in the school having the responsibility of teaching the language that is the medium of instruction from grade six onwards. Despite the unique challenges they faced, they were passionate about teaching this foreign language. They saw the possibilities and advantages of knowing this language, which is the gateway to knowledge in today's world. Their passion was further fueled by the fact that English is the medium to express their ideas and a medium to educate the world about the condition of Tibet.

Commitment. As non-native English language teachers, they are committed to learning more about the language teaching techniques and sharing it with their colleagues, such as the sixth grade English teachers. As teachers teaching the same grade level, they were committed to keeping each other informed about the lessons and to helping each other teach better. At one point they were all very passionate about one of the plays in their English text-book. They were discussing and sharing their ideas regarding how to introduce the lesson and what activities to incorporate to make the lesson more practical and enjoyable. I happened to be observing in three of the sixth grade classrooms and witnessed them incorporating each other's ideas including mine.

Their expertise in teaching the sixth grade English and commitment to the group held them together as a group within the bigger group of English language teachers.

Being able to understand each other's problems that ranged from problems in teaching English grammar usage to dealing with frustrations of the young adults in understanding their language learning difficulties was one of the many things that held the teachers together. Sometimes laughing together at funny spellings, phrases or sentence constructions of students yet consciously pondering together and finding means to approach the mistakes they made, these teachers build a collegial learning environment. Their identification with their group and their expertise provided them the security that they needed to teach the important foreign language. One of the participants felt that way when I was there in the school. She wrote candidly, "When you were here, I personally felt a bit at ease that if I could not work out something on my own, I could always ask you for help but now that security is not there."

Spiritual act. According to the Dalai Lama (2000), one can make one's life meaningful by engaging in spirituality and "it consists in nothing more than acting out of concern for others" (p. 244). The participating teachers showed that they engaged in these spiritual acts when they talked about their colleagues and students. Whenever they learned something new, they were eager to share it with their colleagues. For example, participant 1 had great enthusiasm for sharing and it was evident in many things she initiated. Once I invited her to another class in which I was planning on introducing a reading comprehension strategy and she thanked me for the opportunity. Then, afterwards she told me that she wanted to suggest to all the English teachers for a

workshop on teaching English from me so that the non-participants could also benefit. Three other participants came up with the same request. They valued what she learned and wanted their colleagues to take advantage of that and learn with them too so that they could deepen their knowledge and expertise in teaching English.

When I asked teachers what motivated them to learn as teachers, one of the participants said that she needed to learn not only for her own professional growth but for her students too. “The biggest motivation” for her to learn was her students. She added, “I’ll keep on learning because that it very important thing. Because I have to learn for my students.” She believed that she is helping a lot by helping her students. When it came to helping her students, she said, “I try my best.”

In conclusion, the literature on Community of Practice revealed that “teachers valued opportunities to learn from one another, to set their own professional development agenda, and having time to plan, experiment, and reflect on their assessment practices” (Perry, Walton, & Calder, 1999, p. 218). Similarly, this study came to similar conclusions. “Learning as social participation” where one is an “active participant in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities” which “shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do” (Wenger, 1998, p. 4) was clearly reflected in the participating groups of teachers, who they are, what their purpose is, and what held them together.

Interpretation

In the previous section on data description and analysis, I presented a descriptive, general analysis of what I understood of the participants’ experiences regarding the three

concepts I tried to explore in this study. Nevertheless, as Corbin and Strauss (2008) noted “description is the basis for more abstract interpretation of data and theory development...” (p. 54). The categories explained in the previous section could be termed “basic-level” or “lower-level concepts” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 52). According to the authors, “lower-level concepts point to, relate to, and provide the detail for higher-level concepts” (p. 52).

Building on the previous section, this section of the chapter titled “Interpretation” is my attempt as a novice researcher to analyze and interpret the descriptive data to determine if the categories are related or unrelated, why or why not, and above all, what does it mean. In order to engage in this next level of analysis, I will refocus on the categories and present my interpretation of what I have understood or not understood about the three concepts explored in this study: professional development, teacher learning, and communities of practice.

Professional Development

The participating teachers preferred to use the term “workshop” instead of “professional development,” which was a term I used initially and learned quickly to switch to workshop whenever I communicated with them. Their idea of professional development is a workshop given by some outside educators that they attend, listen to, and then try to apply their teaching. This idea of professional development could have several possible interpretations: (a) professional development is something done to the teachers because the school administrators assume that the knowledge of the experts from other continents will benefit the teachers or because they assume the teachers lack that

knowledge, (b) teachers have no say regarding the content and delivery of the professional development program, (c) teachers assume professional development to be the responsibility of the school administrators not themselves, (d) teachers do not give importance to professional development, (e) school administrators do not care about the teachers' needs and therefore let the outside experts present whatever one-size-fits-all programs they have handy.

Not being listed in the school's calendar of events, random learning opportunities for teachers based on meritocracy and seniority tell us that professional development is not considered important. This in turn implies that the school does not care about the teachers. This is congruent with the fact that the many of the few professional development opportunities the teachers experienced were not relevant to their teaching context and demands. Why can not the teachers say anything to change that? Why are the teachers not doing anything? Do they want to say something? Do they even care? What blocks the teachers from expressing their opinions about the professional development experiences and demanding more relevant opportunities that will improve and enhance their practices?

The participating teachers' preference for professional development programs that are "directly related" to their teaching context and demands is a reasonable and valid choice. As the participating teachers gave me more examples of what they meant by workshops on topics that are "directly related" to their teaching, it also gave me more insight into what professional development meant for them. In order to test my understanding, I offered to assist each teacher, during the lesson observation part of my

research, in planning and teaching if they wanted me to do so. The majority of them took advantage of this offer. Their requests ranged from teaching language skills to teaching grammar, stories, plays, and poems they were teaching during those times. On the one hand, I was happy to hear the positive comments of the teachers about what I shared with them. On the other hand, I was concerned about them. What if I did not offer to assist them, would they improve their teaching practices? What do they usually do on their own to improve their teaching practices since the workshops were not helpful?

If the teachers were concerned about improving their instructional practices, they would have ways to do that on a day-to-day basis instead of waiting for someone to demonstrate or help them. In order to address this, during pre- and post observation conversations and also during the interviews, I asked the teachers what they did on their own, in addition to the guidance offered in the textbooks, to teach the lessons more efficiently, to provide additional information, and to make the lessons more interesting to their students. One teacher candidly told me that because I asked the question, she ended up searching the internet and found some relevant information on the topic she was teaching that she used in her class. Again, what if I had not asked that question, would she have thought of doing it on her own? These thoughts make me ponder more deeply about how much responsibility teachers take for their professional development.

As professional development opportunities were rare, controlled by the school administrators, and the ones the teachers experienced were random and not relevant to their teaching context and demands, sharing among peers provided a viable means for the practicing teachers to help each other learn from and with each other. What, when, how,

and where they share is under their control. The teachers were responsible for that. The school principal had also told the teachers that they could learn from their colleagues and that teachers needed to take advantage of the “resourceful teachers” in their school instead of asking for more workshops. It is true that the school has several resourceful teachers but their call for more relevant workshops cannot be ignored. Professional teachers need professional development opportunities.

Teacher Learning

The term “teacher learning” drew some interesting responses from the participating teachers. For most of them, it was a new term, specifically the combination of those two words. Taken apart, the two words would be among the most familiar words for the teachers although what each word meant for each teacher might differ. Therefore, it was the combination of those two words that lend a new meaning to the term that left most of the participating teachers pondering. Some of them came to the realization there were things that they needed to learn as teachers too and becoming a teacher did not mark the end of learning. It was natural for them to associate learning with students rather than themselves. If “teacher learning” were a new term, does that mean that the teachers were not learning or did not consider their learning important? In their responses to my teacher learning questions, I got mixed responses. For instance, one participant commenting on teacher learning as something “we have never thought about” until I came to the school said, “...we were learning when you came here.” She then explained what their learning entailed, which was “more or less like answering the problems that we face in our day-to-day job.” To her, teacher learning meant more than just solving day-to-day teaching

problems. However, in reality, as she put it, “It’s not like we have a very deep rooted...idea that we should develop ourselves or learn ourselves.” In fact, she pointed out that teachers were doing many things such as sharing and discussing but “it was not directed or intentional to develop ourselves.” She described the purpose of her learning: “I have to learn for my students.”

In a similar vein, another participant thought that although, in general, teachers shared and discussed among themselves, they were not very serious about their own learning. These two participating teachers seemed to describe two purposes of learning for teachers: (a) for students and (b) for themselves. However, they also seemed to hint that the second purpose has not been realized by the teachers or has not been considered important by the teachers. What do teacher see themselves as doing? How is learning for students different from learning for themselves? In what respects?

One participant defined teaching as “a learning process” and did not hesitate to characterize her colleagues as learning teachers whereas another participant was hesitant to call her colleagues as learning teachers but definitely considered herself a learning teacher. One teacher thought the teachers read frequently but “they don’t learn frequently.” To her reading is not equal to learning. In that case, what did learning mean to her? On the contrary, another teacher mentioned about how much she read to learn for her sake and also for her students. Similarly, another participant talked about “a good reading habit” as the most important characteristic that all teachers should possess. Despite contrasting perceptions of what learning meant in association with teachers and

teaching, all the participating teachers agreed that sharing was one thing that they all thought was a useful learning tool that they did on a regular basis.

As one participant put, “Teachers learn best through sharing,” the participating teachers cited some examples of what and when they shared and how they encouraged each other to do the same. Another participant called sharing as the “primary culture” of the school. What did the teacher mean by that? Listening to the participants, I gathered that many of the sharing experiences took place over a cup of tea in a tea shop or during the lunch break or break times in between the daily teaching responsibilities. If sharing was “the primary culture,” why was it relegated to such time slots? Why was not there any set structures to support it? One participant did mention that sharing needs to be a spontaneous act and cannot be imposed. However, the majority of the participating teachers thought that teachers would value a designated sharing time, which is not an addition to their schedules.

Communities of Practice

The aim of Tibetan schools in exile has its foundation in the political, cultural social conditions of the Tibetans as refugees in the aftermath of 1959. As a community of Tibetan schools, they shared the responsibility of providing “a sound education, a firm cultural identity and become self-reliant and contributing members of the Tibetan community and the world at large” (Tibetan Children’s Village, n. d., para. 1). The participating teachers shared membership in a wide range of communities: (a) a community of Tibetan refugees, (b) a community of Tibetan teachers, and (c) a community of Tibetan teachers who teach English. The teachers working in this

particular school shared the unique responsibility of educating the young adults who were deprived of education inside Tibet and who had to escape into India to learn how to read and write.

The purposes of their membership in these communities ranged from regaining freedom to teaching English. The teachers shared the challenges associated in achieving these purposes. They were passionate and committed to these purposes. They took pride in their Tibetan identity and culture, which strengthened and bound them together as a community. As Tibetan Buddhists, they believed and engaged in spirituality. They implemented the motto of the Tibetan Children's Villages, "Others Before Self," seriously in what and how they shouldered their responsibilities.

As a community of Tibetan teachers with the responsibility of teaching English, the participating teachers shared the challenges of teaching a foreign language to young adults. The teachers

Core Categories

As I thought more and more about what story I could tell my readers about the ten participating teachers, I realized that the basic story was that of "sharing." Although, sharing was the central theme, there were other major themes that contributed to that sharing such as participation in communities of practice, and commitment to the responsibilities as Tibetan teachers.

Sharing

After a closer analysis of the four sets of categories in the previous section, I found that the main recurring theme was "sharing." For instance, data indicated that when

the teachers realized that the few professional development experiences available were not relevant to their context and demands, teachers found sharing with the colleagues and learning from and with each other more beneficial than the top-down workshops. Whether it was swapping a teaching tip as they walked to the class or sharing in an organized group, teachers were convinced that sharing was a valuable learning tool for them. Sharing was necessary to survive as teachers where professional development opportunities were rare or not given much importance by the school administrators or by the teachers, although for different reasons. Sharing was something teachers could do without the authorization from a school administrator. Teachers shared content and pedagogical knowledge relevant to their day-to-day teaching responsibilities.

When teachers were asked about how they learned best, their prompt answer was, “sharing.” Sharing was something they claimed, they did on a regular basis. Sharing enabled them to deal with their challenges and also to help their colleagues. This act of helping others is a deeply rooted Buddhist practice that Tibetans engage and encourage others to do the same. To them sharing is a spiritual act: helping their colleagues, which in turn helps the students. Therefore, despite some compatibility difficulties some teachers faced as they shared in pairs or groups, they continued sharing and found value in their participation.

Participation in Communities

Whether the teachers’ participation involved sharing in pairs or groups, formally or informally, and for a short time or a long period of time, mutual participation in the various communities was important to sharing. The participating teachers shared

membership in multiple communities and that common membership and participation not only supported but enhanced their sharing experiences. Moreover, the common goals of the communities inspired the teachers to “to contribute and participate, guide their learning, and gives meaning to their actions” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 28). The communities provided the learning environment one that is built on mutual respect, trust, and concern for others.

Commitment

One important characteristic that the participating teachers revealed and described as an important quality of a learning teacher was “commitment.” Teachers in this group of schools (Tibetan Children’s Village Schools) were known for their hard work and commitment. Their commitment to teaching was intensified by the fact that they were responsible for educating the future citizens of Tibet. They were responsible for educating Tibetan children to develop a firm cultural identity and at the same time, teaching them how and why they needed to preserve their Tibetan language and culture. In order to achieve the above goals, each member needed to commit to sharing and participation.

To conclude, the participating teachers lived and worked in a community that was built was on mutual sharing and participation and who shared several challenging commitments as Tibetan refugee teachers educating the Tibetan refugee children. Understanding the financial and geographical constraints that Tibetan school faced, teachers learned to use the resources that they were available to them. For instance, “human resource” which every school had. They shared, participated, and remained

committed to those acts to help each other to teach better and survive as Tibetan teachers in that remote region in Northern India. Sharing was what teachers had been doing to compensate for the rare, random, and not relevant “workshops” that only few teachers had the “opportunity” to attend. Sharing was not only a way for teachers to help and teach each other the skills and knowledge of teaching but also a way of survival for them.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

Schools across the world share many similarities, as educational institutions. However, “no school or faculty is identical to another. The mix of history, culture, students, staff, goals, community setting, and resources dramatically affects the nature of individual schools” (Bredeson, 2003, p. 21). Bredeson used the metaphor of architecture for professional development to point out the importance of recognizing the school site and local conditions before developing and designing a professional development program. According to the author, many traditional professional development models have failed as a result of these mismatches. The teachers in this study presented ample evidence of this kind of mismatch in the professional development experiences they reported.

If the purpose of professional development is to support professional learning, it is important to understand how teachers learn best, what motivates them to learn, what supports their learning, and above all, what they want to learn. Professional development experiences that recognize the above factors are the kind teachers need and appreciate. Teachers in this study expressed the need for more professional development that was directly related to their everyday work and that required active participation from them. Teachers said that they learnt best from and with each other through discussion and sharing.

The purpose of this study was two-fold: (a) to describe practicing teachers' perception of professional development and teacher learning, and (b) to examine teacher learning from a community of practice perspective. The study explored a small community of English language teachers in a rural Tibetan school in India to provide an understanding of the culture of teacher learning. From a community of practice perspective teachers were studied in terms of what they practice, what challenges they face and how they interact and learn both from and with each other. The data was collected primarily using ethnographic interviewing techniques (Spradley, 1979) supplemented by field notes from participant observations (Spradley, 1980), and teacher journals. Eight female and two male teachers who taught English participated in the study.

Research Questions

In order for professional development programs to enhance and support professional learning, it needs to be aligned with the needs of the teachers. Drawing on literature and research on professional development of practicing teachers, teacher learning, and communities of practice, the following research questions guided the study:

1. What professional development experiences do teachers perceive as most helpful in promoting teacher learning?
2. What are some of the major constraints to professional development and teacher learning as perceived by teachers?
3. What are characteristics of a professionally developing/learning teacher as perceived by the teachers?

4. How and what are teachers learning from and with one another?
5. What motivates teachers to learn?

The above questions were used primarily as guiding questions for the individual teacher interviews without any specific order. The questions also guided the pre- and post-observation conversations with each teacher. All the 10 participating teachers taught one to four and sometimes five English classes everyday. Half of them were also assigned to teaching social studies.

Conclusions: Research Questions

What professional development experiences do teachers perceive as most helpful in promoting teacher learning?

All the teachers emphasized the need for more professional development experiences. However, based on their own experiences and/or from listening to their colleagues, most of the participants reported that the workshops they attended were not relevant. Their professional development opportunities were not based on careful assessment of their needs as teachers and of their students and the local context. Some teachers disliked the rigidity of the formal workshops and preferred a more informal setting, which they thought would greatly enhance their learning experience. Professional development experiences aimed at promoting teacher learning should take into consideration the design, delivery, content, context, and outcomes of the professional development, which Bredeson (2003) pointed out as the important features of successful professional development. When the participating teachers talked about their professional development experiences, they too addressed their preference in terms of the above five

features though not in great detail. Below is a summary of their preferences in terms of design, delivery, content, context, and outcomes:

Design. In terms of design, the teachers wanted professional development programs that took into consideration the unique needs and challenges of the teachers and students in their particular school. They wanted professional development experiences that encouraged active participation on the part of the teachers themselves so that their learning experiences would be more meaningful, which in turn would help them retain what they learned.

Delivery. The participants valued active learning that encouraged active participation rather than “teacher teaching and we listening” as described by one of the participants. Teachers asked for learning opportunities that are appropriate to their needs and interests as adult learners. They wanted professional development experiences that encouraged and supported sharing and team learning. They wanted professional development programs that were flexible yet made creative use of their time and the resources available at school. Most teachers wanted on-site professional development such as in-class expert demonstrations and presentations in real classrooms, with real students, and in real time.

Content. The majority of the participating teachers had a preference for professional development programs that were directly related to their everyday teaching. As much as the teachers appreciated the professional development efforts of the school, when it came to the content they were very specific about their preferences. They wanted something that is explicitly linked to their primary work. As teachers, they wanted

professional development experiences that would deepen their knowledge in terms of content and pedagogy. As English language teachers, they wanted professional development that would enhance their language teaching skills, a specifically named example being teaching poetry. All in all, professional development efforts must be connected to the teachers' day-to-day demands and goals. Teachers wanted learning experiences that they could easily integrate into their daily practices.

Context. The daily demands of the schools kept the teachers' hands and minds very full. Therefore, the teachers preferred professional development that respected their everyday working context. They wanted professional development opportunities that were aligned to their learning culture and that supported their learning. Time being the number one barrier to teacher learning, the teachers wanted professional development that would make creative and wise use of time rather than demanding more time from the teachers out of their already overloaded schedule.

Outcomes. In terms of outcomes of professional development, the teachers looked for professional development that would result in enhanced professional knowledge and skills. As for the participating English teachers, they wanted to learn new ideas, and techniques of teaching English language that would result in improved practices. They wanted to learn better ways and more effective ways of teaching the language skills necessary for their group of students with unique and challenging backgrounds.

All in all, the teachers mentioned the need for more professional development opportunities that addressed the dimensions of the above features. The teachers believed

that such professional development experiences would not only promote teacher learning but also enhance and support it.

What are some of the major constraints to professional development and teacher learning as perceived by teachers?

“Shortage of time” topped the list of major constraints to professional development and especially to teacher learning and sharing. Teachers used their break time, free periods and lunch time to learn and share with their colleagues. Though teachers loved to engage in pedagogical discussions, share and learn together, they usually did not have enough time to do so. Most of their time was taken up with teaching and planning daily lessons. This, they tried to schedule sharing time and had successful sharing time but not often enough because they of time limitations. Many teachers have heavy teaching assignments, such as 4-5 classes per day. After the school hours, teachers were again involved in supervising co-curricular activities. So, if they had fewer classes to teach or fewer co-curricular responsibilities they would likely have more time for self-development.

“Lack of positive response” from colleagues emerged as another obstacle. When colleagues were not cooperative or responsive when approached, interaction and sharing was restricted to only those with whom they felt comfortable. Similarly “lack of understanding” on the part of a colleague and “unwillingness to learn” were some obstacles to sharing and learning as a teacher. One participant emphasized teacher learning and stated metaphorically, “Only a burning candle can light another candle.” The teachers thought that school administration was always ready to support teacher

development and found that the greatest hindrance came from the individuals themselves. “Demoralizing the other teacher” and “not to appreciate but to de-motivate that person” blocked teacher learning and sharing. Such demeaning behaviors and attitudes discouraged teachers from sharing and learning.

“Imposition of strict rules and regulations from the authorities” also appeared to be an obstacle to teacher learning. For some, teacher learning was blocked when one’s hard work was not recognized by the person in authority. For others, too much individuality on the part of colleagues was an obstacle.

Finally, a major obstacle to teacher learning and sharing that was cited was ego. There is a Tibetan proverb which compares one’s ego or pride to a full-blown balloon and knowledge to water. No matter how hard one tries to pour water into a full-blown balloon, one cannot make the balloon hold water because it is already full. Ego was viewed as blocking teachers from sharing and learning from and with others. Jealousy and a sense of competition among colleagues resulted in a lack of sense of appreciation. These negative characteristics inhibited cooperation and sharing among colleagues.

To summarize, the two major constraints to professional development and teacher learning were related to time and personal characteristics of the individual teachers. School administrators needed to take into consideration the teachers’ personal and professional time when providing professional development opportunities to teachers. Teachers needed to develop a positive attitude towards their colleagues and develop good inter-personal skills that would encourage sharing and learning.

What are characteristics of a professionally developing/learning teacher as perceived by the teachers?

Irrespective of their individual comments about teacher learning, most teachers were positive about characterizing the teachers in their school as learning teachers. Many of the qualities in the list fell under “some of the broadly acknowledged qualities of effective teachers” (p. 204) that Nieto (2005) presented: “a solid general education background, a deep knowledge of their subject matter, familiarity with numerous pedagogical approaches, strong communication skills, and effective organizational skills” (p. 204). On comparing the number of entries under each of the above characteristics of effective teachers, “strong communication skills” received the greatest number of entries.

Strong communication skills. A learning teacher is someone who:

- likes sharing, encourages other to share, learn, and develop
- is approachable, friendly, sociable, and understanding
- is supportive, helpful, generous to everyone, and not jealous about others,
- is creative, resourceful, keeps himself/herself informed
- is dedicated, patient, polite, and sincere, and unbiased
- is open-minded, curious, inquisitive, and humorous

This showed that interpersonal skills such as communication skills are very important and necessary qualities of a learning teacher. It is fair to say that the above list is neither an exhaustive list of characteristics of a learning teacher nor is it representative of the characteristics of all participating teachers. However, all the participants were dedicated

teachers who recognized that they have a responsibility for professional learning. They were all committed to teaching and caring for their students. Those teachers revealed and demonstrated several of the characteristics listed above. They valued and recognized that possessing the above characteristics would enhance their teaching and learning experiences, not only at an individual level but also at a group and community level.

How and what are teachers learning from and with one another?

How and what teachers learn from and with their colleagues can be explained at two levels, the individual level and the community level.

Individual level. At this level, their personal actions defined how they learn what they learn. For instance, teachers needed to take responsibility for their professional learning and growth and then remain committed to such responsibilities to sustain and support one's professional learning. One common activity that the participating teachers shared was reading books related to their work. As one participant noted, "I read a lot and nowadays my reading has become quite limited to the subjects that I teach because I don't get much time." Most of them bought books during winter holiday to complement the lessons they taught and shared them with their colleagues. Due to economical and geographical constraints, when the school is in session, teachers are restricted to whatever teaching resources are available at school.

The participating teachers spoke highly of the availability of the resources in their school and also about the school principal's efforts in procuring those resources. Taking into consideration the economical challenges of the institution, the teachers reported that the resources were in abundance. Some teachers suggested that it was the individual

teachers who needed to learn to use the various resources provided by the school. A decade ago, the only resource the school had was a small library with a handful of books, half bought and half donated by generous individuals and groups. Now the school runs an audio-visual laboratory, which is referred to as the “Language Laboratory,” one student computer room with about 35 computers and a small teacher computer room for teachers with 5 computers (for 60+ teachers) which got internet connection in September 2007. Beginning in 2000, the library was upgraded with the purchase of more books and the hiring of a trained librarian to accommodate the increasing student population. The library carries a reference section for the teachers and the teachers also have a resources room but with only a handful of resources.

The teachers needed to make a commitment to acquire new knowledge and skills. Some teachers made a commitment to use the computer and internet. Some teachers made a commitment to do peer-observation. Others have committed themselves to finish their undergraduate and graduate degrees through correspondence courses which is quite a challenging task when one has a full-time job, especially when that job is teaching. Teachers needed their friends’ and colleagues’ support and encouragement to fulfill these commitments.

The easiest way to learn, according to some, but not all teachers, was sharing. One participant explained, “Teachers can learn best through sharing. I think it is very important. The more we share, the more we learn.” Although there was a unanimous agreement on the above statement, teachers differed in the opinion regarding what they shared. To mention a few, some teachers insisted on sharing both positive and negative

experiences, pointing out that many teachers share only negative experiences. Some shared only those activities or teaching ideas that worked well in their classes, such as those activities that gave them “100% involvement from the students.”

Teachers valued and enjoyed sharing with their colleagues and encouraged others to do the same. However, the teachers also believed that every teacher needed to understand that such behaviors cannot be imposed. Sharing must be spontaneous. Every teacher must have a strong urge within herself or himself to learn. Teachers also learnt the importance of creating a collegial environment in order to engage in effective sharing with their colleagues. The individual teacher’s personality played an important role in creating such an environment. Both collegiality and sharing demanded some level of humility and courage on the part of individual teachers. The participating teachers reported that they discussed and shared with those with whom they felt comfortable and whom they found friendly, cooperative and helpful. Irrespective of with whom they shared, the teachers believed that sharing was a good way of learning and helping other teachers learn. It encouraged “team learning and sharing.”

Community level. At this level, who they are, what their purpose is, and what holds them together as a community of teachers defined how and what they learnt from and with each other. The participating teachers are Tibetans living in exile and struggling for freedom. They are Tibetans struggling to preserve their culture and tradition. The greatest concern they share is obtaining freedom from Communist China. Their greatest problem is how to pave that way to freedom. They are all passionate about Tibet and its

freedom. To be more specific, they are Tibetan teachers committed to nurturing the future seeds of Tibet.

Talking more specifically of the 10 participants, as English language teachers, they were responsible and committed to make their students as good in English as possible since it is the universal language of communication and provide their students access to both material and nonmaterial resources. However, their job was challenging, since they were non-native English language speakers teaching English in a foreign language context with limited or no exposure to the language except in their classrooms. This was made more challenging by the fact that English is the medium of instruction for all other subjects that are taught in the Tibetan schools from sixth grade onwards. As English language teachers, their greatest concern was how to make their students proficient enough in two years so that they could jump to 6th grade or even higher, given that the students in that particular school were already in their late teens when they arrived from Tibet with little or no schooling experience at all.

The problems those teachers shared ranged from difficulties involved in teaching young adults a foreign language to taking care of personal problems of those young adults. The teachers were concerned about the smooth functioning of many of the co-curricular activities for which they were responsible. Therefore, the teachers were not only English language teachers or math teachers. There were so many different responsibilities involved that they had to wear several hats throughout the academic session. Despite all those unique challenges, the teachers were passionate about teaching English.

As non-native English language teachers teaching students who spoke the same native language, they needed the knowledge and expertise to teach the language effectively in such a teaching and learning context. The teachers needed to work hard and smart to address the challenges of teaching English today. As one participant noted, “To be a good teacher, a teacher has to change.” Another teacher wrote in her journal how sharing with her colleagues enabled her to learn a better way of teaching a particular poem that benefited both her and her students.

For the 10 practicing teachers, it is this common practice of teaching under the same working conditions that they share which brought them together as a community. Working with each other, helping each other, arguing with each other, sometimes working against each other, discussing and sharing the good days and the bad days, the teachers orchestrated their day-to-day work days and their interpersonal relationship in order to cope, sustain and succeed at their jobs. This made teaching a practice and this community of practice helped to sustain the teachers’ ability to do their work.

Having the responsibility of teaching the language that is the medium of instruction from grade six onwards, they played a critical role in the education of the Tibetan students. They recognized the possibilities and challenges of teaching this foreign language and worked passionately in the company of their colleagues. They understood the power of the English language in educating the people of the world about the critical situation of Tibet.

As non-native English language teachers, they were committed to learning more about language teaching techniques and sharing them with their colleagues. Whenever

they learned something new, they were eager to share it with their colleagues so that they could deepen their knowledge and expertise in teaching English. Their identification with their group and their expertise provided them the security and enthusiasm that they needed to teach the important foreign language.

What motivates teachers to learn?

The teachers shared a variety of motivating factors. As a Tibetan teacher, the greatest source of motivation for one participant was the current situation of Tibet. The critical need of good education for the Tibetan students, especially for the student population in that school, encouraged the teachers to become better teachers. As a Buddhist, the teachers believed in Karma, which motivated them to do their job well, to benefit both themselves and the students.

For some professional development programs that they attended and the pieces of advice they received from “great teachers,” such as “Great teachers mean those who inspire students,” motivated them to learn more and become better teachers. To some, the urge to excel as English teachers and receive recognition from the students motivated them to learn. Job satisfaction was another source of motivation. They believed in “the hope of changing students’ lives” (Nieto, 2009). Particularly, in their school, the teachers found the students to be very hard working and enthusiastic about learning. As one teacher described, “To address to their needs and enthusiasm, I also learn.”

For some, student outcomes were the greatest motivating factor followed by recognition of one’s efforts by the school administrators and colleagues. According to one participant, the latter would play an important role in retaining especially new

teachers. Another participant suggested that the school needed to pay more attention to the teachers. She called for more time to learn, computer instruction classes for teachers, a good number of computers, resource books for teachers and relocating these resource or teacher's reference books from the library to the teachers' break room. Provision of these facilities could motivate the teachers to learn.

All teachers complained that they did not have enough time to devote to their own learning. Therefore, one participant suggested reducing their teaching workload. Another participant wondered how the school would make more time for teachers considering the teachers' personal time, especially those with families. They recommended freeing up some time from their already busy schedule rather than adding on to it. They hoped that such restructuring might motivate the teachers to learn.

Discussing and sharing in groups motivated teachers to learn more from each other. For some, a friendly environment was necessary. Helpful colleagues and good resources also encouraged teachers to share and learn.

Implications

Implications for Professional Development

When developing professional development programs for teachers it is very important to recognize that teachers are adult learners and respect their needs as learners. According to Knowles (1984), adults are autonomous and self-directed, have accumulated a foundation of life experiences and knowledge, goal-oriented, relevancy-oriented, practical, and adults need to be shown respect. These characteristics need to be

considered into the design, delivery, content, context, and outcomes of any professional development programs.

Program developers need to encourage as much participation as possible from the teachers at the planning and designing stages of professional development program so that their needs are addressed appropriately. Teachers are the primary stakeholders when it comes to implementation of the professional development program. Therefore, every professional development program should include a program assessment component at the end of the program where teachers will be able to provide feedback and comments about the program to improve the program in the future.

Not all professional development programs that are introduced by educators from advanced countries are workable and relevant to the host school. Professional development programs can be developed locally based on the local needs of the teachers. Instead of having a pre-planned program, professional development experts can listen to the teachers' current professional needs and working context and develop a professional development program tailored to those needs.

Implications for Teachers

Teachers are professionals and they need to be responsible for their own professional learning and growth. Professional learning is not a destination but a journey that a professional undertakes throughout his or her professional life. A successful journey requires not only the head but also the heart to carry on the journey. Moreover, creating a "supportive culture" where teachers can believe in the confidence of their colleagues and where they view each other as "caring, cooperative, and intellectually

curious” (Smith, Wilson, & Corbett, 2009, p. 21) will have immense benefits for teacher learning. Professional responsibility can be extended to one’s colleagues and the community as a whole.

By generously sharing one’s professional learning or teaching practice one will be able to help others and improve one’s learning too. Teachers must have the willingness to share and courage to take the criticism positively and give constructive criticism to enhance professional growth and learning. Rooted deeply in Buddhist tradition and philosophy, is the spiritual act of “acting out of concern for others” (Dalai Lama, 2000, p. 244) and encouraging oneself and other to engage in spirituality will benefit both the parties. As a community sharing a common practice, they need to create a healthy learning environment that will engage them in dialogues centered around professional practice and student learning.

Teachers need to develop good personalities to work with and engage in dialogues with their colleagues and superiors. Teachers must be able to lead and possess a range of process skills such as interpersonal and communication, problem solving, creative and critical thinking, conflict resolution and active listening (Diamond & Spuches, cited in Diamond, 2002). When working in groups, recognizing and appreciating others’ personalities and styles will maximize the participation and contribution of every member of the group.

Teachers need to reflect on their professional learning and evaluate it. Such evaluations will help them to suggest and recommend professional development

programs that are more relevant to them. It will also reveal one's strengths and weaknesses and pave way for strengthening one's professional learning and practice.

Finally teachers need to recognize the advantages of working with colleagues. Material resources may be scarce but this human resource is in abundance in the company of one's colleagues. Sharing with one's colleagues the concerns and challenges of every day practices and learning together in the process is a cost-effective learning activity, as long as administrators help to make available the time that it requires, without sacrificing their personal lives to do it. Teachers need to learn the value of "being intentionally supportive" (Heston, Tidwell, & Fitzgerald, 2008, p. 175) of each other. According to the authors, "living as critical friends...for all our colleagues and viewing them as critical friends of good intention lets us build a more hospitable environment in which we can create learning communities that flourish across varied context" (p. 175).

Implications for Administrators

The teachers in this study spent most of their time at school doing what a teacher had to do. Professional development for professional learning comes only second in their thoughts. School administrators need to emphasize the importance of professional development for teachers and work towards providing more opportunities for professional development experiences taking into consideration their needs. In Hord and Hirsh's (2009) words, "emphasize to teachers that you know they can succeed—together" (p. 22).

Administrators need to carve out time for teachers to talk and share taking into consideration their already heavy schedule. Consider teachers' personal time when

carving time. Provide appropriate and abundant resources in terms of material and emotional support to encourage professional learning. In order for teachers to use the resources, especially educational materials, provide timely and necessary guidance and instruction to them. Instead of controlling and deciding on what professional development teachers require, they need to give some autonomy for teachers since professional development is for teachers. Administrators need to create structures within the school time table to provide a platform for teachers where they can share and discuss their ideas. Sometimes teachers need to be assigned to responsibilities because their schedules are too tight to volunteer for professional learning activities.

Implications for International Students

As an international graduate student in an American university and as a novice researcher, I would urge US universities to support and encourage international students who possess characteristics that make them uniquely positioned to carry out research not only in the US but also in their home communities. This will be beneficial to both the communities.

I consider myself very fortunate for having this opportunity to study for an advanced degree and I am confident that I can contribute in the field of education by working here. However, there is more need of my expertise and contribution in my own community that provided the foundation for my education. Many international scholars decide to work in the US after getting higher degrees here due to benefits that are practical to think about. Talking about her and other indigenous people who had similar histories as researchers, Smith (2006) wrote:

The tertiary education was alienating and disconnected from the needs of their own communities. The more educated they became the more it was assumed that they would not want to return to their communities. Assimilation policies in education were intended to provide one way out for those indigenous people who 'qualified'. Many did take that road and have never returned. There are many others, however, who choose to remain, to wear their identities with pride and work with and for their own communities and nations. (p.199)

If educated people abandon their own community, who will take care of the education of the children especially, the ones in developing countries or even worse, those who live as refugees. Therefore, having made this commitment myself, I urge international scholars to return and serve in their own communities.

International scholars and researchers have the responsibility to study and carry out more investigations on topics that will benefit their community. International students possess the unique advantages of being a native researcher. As native researchers, they have the understanding to select culturally appropriate research methods.

Lessons I Learnt Doing Fieldwork

Being a Native Researcher: Pros and Cons

Despite the challenges and obstacles of being a novice researcher, I realize that I have benefited immensely from being a native researcher. Moreover, having been a member of the community I returned to the same community for conducting research has contributed significantly to overall data collecting procedures in several ways. First, I had easy access to the community, in general. Contacting the school authorities for permission to stay on campus, contacting the teachers and visiting the classes proceeded smoothly, knowing the community and who to contact and above all, how to contact

them. This easy access to the community saved a lot of time. Second, being a native speaker afforded me access to the many nuances of the native language and the culture of the participants. Third, having been an English teacher in that school in the past, I was easily able to built trust and develop rapport with the participating teachers.

Consequently, I was able to assist them in their day-to-day teaching challenges, which was satisfying to both the teachers and to me. As stated by the school Director:

Thank you for returning to this school. Usually, people have the tendency of not returning to an old work place as if it stinks like an old piece of something. I'm glad that you were here and the teachers are too. They are very satisfied with what you have shared with them. (Ngodup Wangdue, personal communication, July 16, 2008)

Every society values “the act of giving back” and Tibetans are no exception. The school director appreciated my doing this; I did not realize this until I was there doing my research. My idea of giving back was returning and serving the Tibetan community after I graduate. Being able to do my research and receive commendations for that at the same time was more than I had imagined.

Now that I have discussed some of the advantages I had as a native researcher, I think I also have the responsibility to share some of the challenges I faced. The later part of my stay at the school coincided with the Beijing Olympics. Tibetans in every nook and corner of the world followed the torch relay very closely reading, watching, listening, blogging, and protesting against China by organizing peace marches, hunger strikes, and candlelight vigils. Many Tibetan communities temporarily closed their business and participated in the activities. Although the TCV schools wanted to join them, they remained open because of the primacy of the responsibility to educate the future citizens

of Tibet. In the evenings we gathered to offer our prayers to the many who died and who are suffering inside Tibet. We held candlelight vigils in our neighboring towns and prayed. It was very difficult to stay calm and composed with the disturbing news coming from Tibet. Beginning in March, we experienced many tense and sad months. I found solace in the regular evening prayers we held for several months in the company of my fellow Tibetans. Reminding myself that worrying would not help improve the situation of Tibet at that point and that it would be more constructive to stay focused on my responsibility as a researcher, I forced myself to stay on task however emotional I was during those especially trying months. One can understand this as a characteristic of fieldwork rather than a disadvantage. As Wolcott (2005) stated:

Emotion is an aspect of fieldwork that has begun to receive special attention, as we have come to regard it as a potential ally in our work rather than a sign of weakness in the worker. Here is what art can embrace as a treasured source of energy and insight what the more systematic approaches manage too often and too well to exclude. (p. 59)

On Transcribing

Despite the benefits of transcribing interviews by oneself, to save time, I asked the teachers themselves to transcribe their own interviews and paid them commensurate with their salary. This method worked according to the ethical principles that I respected as a researcher and professional responsibilities to safeguard my informants' rights, interests, sensitivities, and privacy.

On Journaling

After reading the journals of the participants, I realized that many of the participating teachers did not capture the essence of journaling. Most of the journals read

more like minutes or a list of ideas they had heard, read or talked about rather than reflecting on their own learning, which was the purpose I had for their journaling for this research. Therefore, some instructions on how to write a reflective journal would have been beneficial both for the participants and the purposes of the research.

On Data Collection Sequence

As advised by one of my dissertation committee members, I started my data collection with participant observation followed by individual teacher interviews. My participant observation role rewarded me abundantly when the time came to interview the participants individually. My participant observation role included sitting in the classroom for 20 hours for each teacher. During these times, I participated as a student in the classroom activities, learnt what the students were taught and also participated as a teacher by teaching and sometimes team-teaching with the host teacher. During the pre- and post-lesson observation, the host teacher and I planned and discussed our ideas. These opportunities afforded both the host teacher and me the time to know each other and more importantly build trust and respect for each other. Therefore, by the time I interviewed them, most of the participants felt comfortable talking to me about themselves and other teachers. As I was concluding the interview with one participant, she thanked me and shared her thoughts at the end of the interview:

Thank you very much for making very comfortable to talk with you and this is the most important characteristic (laughs) for a researcher. So, I thought that you have been very successful in keeping up with all your...you know...what should I...conditions and keeping the confidentiality and...all these...that is you are giving assurance and with this assurance, I think all of us can say openly and freely to you and um...with this I think you'll also get the information...true information. Otherwise, people will try to give fake information. They'll pretend

and they may feel insecure and with all these assurances, I felt very comfortable and I wish you all the best. Thank you.

Recommendations for Future Research

The present study explored teacher learning based on 10 practicing teachers' perception of professional development and teacher learning. Though this study involved people belonging to a unique cultural group that has rarely been the focus of research, the population lacked diversity. Therefore, for future research, ethnicity could be explored as a factor through comparative research. Are there any aspects of the culture of a particular ethnic group that promote or hinder teacher learning or a particular approach to or type of teacher learning? Teacher learning could be also explored in terms of gender. Who is more concerned about teacher learning? What are the similarities and differences between their views and understanding of teacher learning?

Another interesting population to study could be novice and expert teachers, comparing and contrasting their perspective of teacher learning. How important is teacher learning to each group of teacher? Do age and experience influence their views on teacher learning and its importance? Teacher learning could be also explored across different school levels such as elementary, middle, and high school. Does the age of the population the teachers teach affect teachers' teacher learning efforts? What are its implications?

Teacher learning could be also examined in terms of the subjects the teachers teach. For instance, are science teachers more concerned about teacher learning than the language arts teacher or vice versa? What are the differences in their views on teacher learning? What are sources for these differences in views?

The nationality status of the teacher population could be also explored as a factor that might influence teacher learning. Is there a difference in the urgency and importance of teacher learning based on whether the teacher is and is teaching a population of students who are refugees or are citizens of an independent nation? Is there a difference in how seriously teachers take the responsibility of teacher learning/their learning?

The current study did not focus on the role of school principal or higher administration. However, data collected for this study indicated revealed the importance of school principal's role in providing time and resources that would enhance and encourage teacher learning. Therefore, the role of principal could be studied in greater detail to provide greater insights into the role of school principal to improve and support teacher learning experiences.

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APPENDIX A

A1. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)

A2. TIBETAN CHILDREN'S VILLAGE SCHOOL PERMISSION LETTER

A3. CONSENT LETTER

A1. Institutional Review Board (IRB)Office of Sponsored Programs

Human Participants Review Committee
 UNI Institutional Review Board (IRB)
 213 East Bartlett Hall

Pema Yangchen
 109 F Street
 Cedar Falls, IA 50613

Re: IRB 07-0001

Dear Pema:

Your study, **Teacher Learning in a Tibetan School in Exile: A Community Practice Perspective**, has been approved by the UNI IRB effective 8/1/07, following an Expedited review performed by IRB Co-Chair, Larry Hensley, Ed.D. You may begin enrolling participants in your project.

Modifications: If you need to make changes to your study procedures, samples, or sites, you must request approval of the change before continuing with the research. Changes requiring approval are those that may increase the social, emotional, physical, legal, or privacy risks to participants. Your request may be sent by mail or email to the IRB Administrator.

Problems and Adverse Events: If during the study you observe any problems or events pertaining to participation in your study that are *serious* and *unexpected* (e.g., you did not include them in your IRB materials as a potential risk), you must report this to the IRB within 10 days. Examples include unexpected injury or emotional stress, missteps in the consent documentation, or breaches of confidentiality. You may send this information by mail or email to the IRB Administrator.

Expiration Date: Your study **approval will expire on July 31, 2008**. Beyond that, you may not recruit participants or collect data without continuing approval. We will email you an Annual Renewal/Update form about 4-6 weeks before your expiration date, or you can download it from our website. You are responsible for seeking continuing approval before your expiration date *whether you receive a reminder or not*. If your approval lapses, you will need to submit a new application for review.

Closure: If you complete your project before the expiration date, or it ends for other reasons, please download and submit the IRB Project Closure form. It is especially important to do this if you are a student and planning to leave campus at the end of the academic year. Advisors are encouraged to monitor that this occurs.

Forms: Information and all IRB forms are available online at www.uni.edu/osp/research/IRBforms.htm.

If you have any questions about Human Participants Review policies or procedures, please contact me at 319.273.6148 or at anita.kleppe@uni.edu. Best wishes for your project success.

Sincerely,

Anita M. Kleppe
 Anita M. Kleppe, MSW
 IRB Administrator

cc: Linda Fitzgerald, Advisor

A2. Tibetan Children's Village School Permission Letter

June 27, 2007

<<Name of the Principal>>

<<Name of the School>>

<<Address>>

<<Postal Code>>

Dear Principal,

I am beginning a doctoral research dissertation at the University of Northern Iowa entitled "Teacher Learning in a Tibetan School in Exile: A Community of Practice Perspective." The University requires that you give your signed agreement to permit me to conduct research in your school. Therefore, I would like your permission to use the school as my research site and to interview and observe English teachers for a year beginning September 2007. With your permission, teachers will be invited to participate in the research and participation is strictly voluntary. The invitation letter will include a brief description of the research and the research procedures involved so that they can make an informed decision about participation.

All information obtained during this study that could identify the school and the teachers will be kept strictly confidential through a coding process that will separate the names from the data. The finding will be used in my dissertation and could be published in professional journals or presented at professional conferences.

I would greatly appreciate your consent to my request. If you require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached at pemay@uni.edu or my advisor, Linda Fitzgerald, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Northern Iowa, at Linda.fitzgerald@uni.edu. You can also contact the IRB Administrator, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-6148.

If you do not have the authority to prove the permission requested above, I would appreciate any contact information you can give me regarding the proper authority holder(s), including current address(es). Otherwise, your permission confirms that you hold the right to grant the permission requested here.

A duplicate copy of this request has been provided for your records. If you agree with the terms as described above, please sign the release form below and send me a copy.

Sincerely,

Pema Yangchen
109 F Street
Cedar Falls, IA 50613

Permission granted for the use of school and contacting teachers for the purposes as described above:

Name & Title: _____

School: _____ Date: _____

A3. Consent Letter

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA
HUMAN PARTICIPANT REVIEW
INFORMED CONSENT FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

August 12, 2007

Dear Colleague,

You are invited to participate in a research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. I have obtained permission from your school principal to contact you regarding my research. The purpose of this study is to understand how, when and why teachers learn and to contribute to the literature and research on professional development of teachers and teacher learning. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to participate.

This research is for a doctoral dissertation: *Teacher Learning in a Tibetan School in Exile: A Community of Practice Framework*. You have been selected to participate in the study because you are an English teacher in a Tibetan school in exile. The study will involve: (a) classroom observations for a month or less (an hour per day), (b) teacher meeting observations whenever there is a meeting, (c) individual interview for about an hour, and (d) group interviews. I would also like to ask you to keep a journal throughout this research period (October 2007-December 2007 and March 2008-July 2008) and note down any professional learning experiences on a weekly basis. With your permission, I would also like to tape record the interview to assure accuracy of all information. These tapes will be stored in a secure place until my research is published in academic journals and presented at scholarly conferences. No one will have access to the data except I and my dissertation committee members.

All information obtained during this study that could identify you will be kept strictly confidential through a coding system that will separate your name from the data. The finding of this research will be used in my dissertation and could be published in academic journals, presented at scholarly conferences and to do a post-doctoral follow-up if I can secure funding.

There are no reasonably foreseeable risks to participation in the study. Although there are no direct benefits to participation, this research will give you a chance to reflect on your own learning and to reflect critically on the professional development experiences that you have experienced. Your time will be compensated. The following are some of my ideas of ways to compensate for your time: English reference books for teachers, Internet access for a certain number of years, subscription to professional journals for a certain number of years, educational DVDs, etc. Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all, and by doing so, you will not be penalized.

If you have questions about the study or desire information in the future regarding your participation or the study generally, you can contact me pemay@uni.edu or my advisor, Dr. Linda M. Fitzgerald at linda.fitzgerald@uni.edu at the Department of Curriculum and Instructions, University of Northern Iowa. You can also contact the office of the IRB Administrator, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process.

Thank you for your time and attention to my research. I look forward to meeting you. Please email me at pemay@uni.edu if you will participate in this study.

Thank you,
Pema Yangchen
Doctoral Student

Dr. Linda M. Fitzgerald
Advisor

Agreement:

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.

(Signature of participant)

(Date)

(Printed name of participant)

(Signature of researcher)

(Date)

(Signature of advisor)

(Date)

Permission to Tape Record

The purpose of tape recording our interviews is to assure accuracy. After the findings are published in academic journals, presented at scholarly conferences and used for future research, the tape recordings will be destroyed.

I give my permission for the interviews relating to the dissertation topic: *Teacher Learning in a Tibetan School in Exile: A Community of Practice Framework* to be tape recorded.

(Signature of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Researcher)

(Date)

APPENDIX B
SAMPLE INTERVIEW

Sample Interview

1. Tashi Delek, (a Tibetan greeting) Gyenla. How are you?
2. First of all, as explained in my letter, I would like to tape record our interview. I want to assure that I will not use your name in any form of my work. I will destroy the tape once my research is complete and has been finalized. Could you please sign this consent form for me? This gives me permission to tape record our interview. Thank you.
3. I also wanted you to know that I'll be transcribing the interview and once I finish it, I would like you to read it and we can make clarifications if we need to.
4. I'm really glad you could talk to me today. Well, as I explained in the letter, I'm interested in understanding your professional development and learning experiences as a teacher.
5. How is school going?
6. How did you get to this school?
7. I've taught in this school but that was quite some time ago. I'm sure many things have changed. Don't you think so?
8. Well, let me explain what I'm interested in. I would like to find out what professional development and learning experiences are available in this school. I guess, what I want to know is if I got a teaching job in this school, what are some activities that I need to do improve my learning.
9. The last time I taught in this school was May, 2001. Could you take me through the school and kind of tell me what is like to be a teacher today? Could you start

at the beginning of a school year and describe to me what goes on during the year?

10. Could you describe some professional development activities during the year?
11. I'm also interested in knowing what kind of professional development activities teachers would prefer?
12. Could you describe a professional development activity that you liked? What was unique about this particular professional development activity?
13. Could you tell me what you usually do during the year on your own or with colleagues to improve your learning?
14. How often do you meet with your colleagues to discuss teaching issues? In other words, how often do you seek help and/or help other teachers?
15. How do you find time for these conversations or collaborative efforts?
16. How important is your learning as a teacher?
17. How do you learn best as a teacher?
18. If you were asked to put together a professional development activity, what would be some of its highlights?
19. I think we will stop here for today. I might have more questions after going through the transcripts. I will keep in touch with you. Thank you so much for your time. I learned a lot from you today. Have a nice day.